

FLY AWAY PAUL

Paul Ndizile—Fly Away Paul—is the first of his Pondoland family to be educated. His father's people farm the barren tribal fields on the edge of the Indian Ocean, living on the edge of starvation, under the sway of the village Headman and the white trader. His father is cookboy in a European household in the city, and his mother owns a teacart. Together they manage to send their son to Mission school and to university. He is intelligent, gifted and gentle—but it is difficult to remain gentle among the tensions of Johannesburg. He writes for newspapers, and is considered to be embittered by his family and by his European acquaintances. Half against his will, by the weight of hostile circumstances, he is thrown into association with the extremists among his people, and swept into trouble. It is the turning point in his life; his passport for a scholarship to an American university is withheld; he is exiled to a Pondoland he has never seen. But he remains himself; he writes peacefully and with courage in his new limited life, until the inescapable world of drama and politics catches up with him and he is again made to fly away, in a dénouement which is both tragic and inevitable.

The two worlds of rural Pondoland and the hectic cities, and the people who belong in each, are recreated with immediate and poignant authenticity. Hans Hofmeyer's writing has a simplicity and power which will remind many readers of Hemingway, but the haunting elegiac quality of this novel has a distinction which is entirely his own.

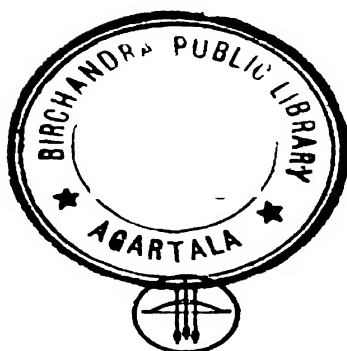
By the same author

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**THE SKIN IS DEEP
GARIBALDI'S SKI-BOAT**

FLY AWAY PAUL

Hans Hofmeyer



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Mofolokohlo means a pile of stones and the last river to cross could be the Kuphela but you won't find these names on a map. A man called Ndizile might well have flown, but he is an entirely imaginary character, like all the rest of them.

H.H.

*Also to Lores,
dear Editor and Secretary*

I

LEZINYONI

I

Mashupa's two oxen were weak. The rains were late and the ground was hard. He swung the long whip above his head and cracked it beneath the bellies of the leaders. Kwenkwana held firm to the plough handles but still the blades would not enter. Paul's plough scraped and rattled over the hard earth and the oxen stumbled forward.

'No,' Mashupa said, 'we must wait. We must wait as we waited last year. This old plough of my brother's cannot turn such dry earth.'

'But we must plant, father.'

'The light spitting last night was not enough. We must wait.'

Mashupa turned away and he told his son to outspan the oxen. He walked across the small field towards his hut.

He sat down in the shade of the hut wall, leaning his back against the rough mud. He stretched one leg out in front of him—the one that was always tired. It was a thin leg. It had been thin since childhood and the ankle was insecure. It had always worried him, that ankle. Always it made him walk with a strange limp. Was that why he had been called Mashupa? Was that why they had laughed at him? Because he shuffled along and because he was unable to go out to work with the others when he was a young man? Mashupa-shupa, shuffle along, you strange limper! He moved the foot of the outstretched leg from side to side and he leant forward and squeezed a feeble muscle. It was not a bad leg really. It had kept him moving through these many years. It

had kept him on the land too and that was important. A Pondo must stay on the land.

Nothandile came out of the hut and she carried a tin bowl full of water. The water was soapy and dirty and the bowl was cracked. She threw the water out on to the ground and two chickens ran up to the damp patch and scratched around.

'Is there anything there for them to eat?' Mashupa asked.

'Oh, you are back. What of the ploughing?'

'The earth is too hard. We will have to wait.'

'Always we wait. And then when the time comes it is so late that we must have a lima party. Like last year.'

'It was a good party last year and the land was well ploughed.'

'But this year there is nothing to make the beer and we haven't a pig.'

'Perhaps I could buy one.'

Nothandile banged the tin bowl against the door post, then wiped a scum from it with her hand, flicking it away from her in anger.

'Of course that is how we will do it! We will earn money and buy a pig. We will kill the pig and have a party and all your friends will come to the party and meanwhile they will plough your land for you. Also, you will have to buy some grain for the beer. And perhaps some tobacco. And some sugar and some salt. Yes! Buying is a good thought. Buy this, buy that!'

She disappeared into the hut and Mashupa rubbed his thin leg, shaking his head as he did so.

'If my leg had been sound when I was young I would have gone away too, and then where would we all be?' he asked, but Nothandile was busy inside the hut and she did not hear.

Kwenkwana and Poto approached and Kwenkwana was carrying the whip that his father had left in the field.

'Where can we get a pig?' Mashupa said, but Kwenkwana only looked at him and leant the long whip against the hut wall. He fingered the long thong, picking fluff from the flicked end.

Poto went straight into the hut and he brought out his young sister so that she could play in the sun. He smiled at her as he settled her near her father. Mashupa smiled too and he placed his hand on the small head and turned the face towards him.

'Where can we get a pig?' he asked with a smile, but Nowinile's mouth remained expressionless and she only stared at him.

As Mashupa looked into his daughter's eyes he saw there the grey glaze of hunger and the oozing mess of her ill health. Flies stuck like ticks around the child's eyes and they buzzed shamelessly around her head.

'Nothandile!' Mashupa shouted, struggling to his feet. 'Nothandile! Bring that basin, bring water!'

Nothandile hurried out, alarmed by the intensity of her husband's voice.

'What is it?'

'Look at the child. Look at her eyes! Wash them, wash them, woman!'

Nothandile shrugged her shoulders and went back into the hut. She came out with the bowl again. In the bowl was a little cloudy water.

Mashupa picked up the child and held her.

'Wash her face!' he commanded.

With her fingers Nothandile bathed the child's eyes. The water dropped to Nowinile's chest and trickled over her bulging stomach.

'Get a rag! To clean her properly!'

Nothandile put the bowl down and with her skirt—a coarse cloth daubed with red ochre—she wiped the child's face. Streaks of the ochre marked Nowinile's cheeks.

'A clean rag!' Mashupa shouted, and then he wondered suddenly just where they could find a clean rag. At least his own shirt was not ochre-covered. It was old and torn but it was cleaner than his wife's skirt. He put Nowinile down and wiped the child's face with the tail of his shirt. Nothandile handed him a cloth, the one which she kept for her head when she went to the store. Mashupa pushed the cloth away. Again he picked up his daughter and looked into her eyes. They were cleaner now and the flies had gone, but there was still that dullness about them.

'She must eat,' Mashupa said. 'She must eat porridge with some milk! And sugar. Sour milk. Thick, and the sugar on top of it. Come, woman, feed the child!'

Nothandile took Nowinile from her father's arms. She turned to go back into the hut but then she stopped.

'You could buy some of that food in a tin for her. Or even white bread and jam. Go on! You go out and buy some so that I may feed her. So that her skin will shine and flies will not sit on her eyelids. Go on, buy something for her, for her legs are weak and her stomach is blown out and she only stares at me. Yet how many harvests will she see? Go on, go out and buy! What will you get from this old field!'

She turned then and went into the hut.

Mashupa looked up at Kwenkwana who still stood there, fingering the long thong of the idle whip, then he turned and stared at their field. Truly it was old. It had fed them for many years and, like a mother who watches her children grow as she herself fades, it had become barren and unyielding. And yet, had it fed them? Had it fed them well, so that they were all fine-limbed and strong? Or had it only seeped a little life to them? But that was it. They were alive, so therefore it had fed them! They were all alive. He, Mashupa, Nothandile, Kwenkwana, Poto and the tiny large-eyed youngest of them all, Nowinile. There had been three other children, but they had died. They had not even placed a foot on the earth. Those who had done so, those who had stood up and covered a place of their own on the earth, they were alive. And it was because of the mealies that they were so. Sometimes the mealies were eaten by worms and sometimes there was only a thin porridge for a meal in the evening, but the field had indeed fed them. Only this last harvest it had given up its few bags. It had given them up but it had seemed to be unwilling. The cobs had been thin and empty, dotted here and there with corn, unhealthy, like the mouth of an old man.

'The rain will come and then we'll try again,' Kwenkwana said, sitting down next to his father, also with his back against the hut wall.

Mashupa smiled and clapped a hand on his son's thigh.

'You never knew your uncle,' he said. 'He went away because he saw that the cobs were dried and feeble. He no longer has to follow behind an old plough while the clouds hang high and

light in the sky, but you and I, my son, we will wait for the rain.'

'You often talk of him, father.'

'He must be an old man now! Old Paul, my brother, making bicycles in a factory!'

'These days many men make things in factories. Not all of them stay on the land.'

Mashupa looked at his son and Kwenkwana turned his eyes away and reached for the whip thong which hung limp from the long pole.

'But *we* stay on the land,' Mashupa said. 'We plough and we plant and the best way to do that is to have a lima party.'

'We'll need a pig, father.'

'A pig and half a bag of grain.'

Mashupa slowly rose to his feet, his weight on the good leg, then he walked away from the hut without saying anything more to his son. He was thinking of a child's eyes.

It was three miles to Zamakulungisa's store and Mashupa could not walk as fast as other men. When he arrived at the store the doors were closed so he sat down to wait for Zamakulungisa to finish his lunch.

Some women also waited and one of them spread a cloth on the concrete floor of the stoep and into it she poured the money she would use for the afternoon's shopping. She spread the coins out on the cloth as one spreads infested grain so that one may pick the vermin from it. Mashupa looked at the spread of money and wondered if it would buy a pig. Then he looked at the woman. She was a red-blanketed woman and she knelt over the money on the cloth. She leant forward, her elbows on the floor and her fingers picked at the coins. The other women watched her and laughed as she named each coin. When Mashupa heard her talk he realized that she was Shixini's new wife and everyone knew that Shixini was a man of considerable wealth what with his cattle and his goats and his wagon.

One of Zamakulungisa's shop assistants opened the door. The women hurried in, but Mashupa waited until he was sure that Zamakulungisa himself was in the store. Then he rose and went

in. Zamakulungisa was not behind the counter but Mashupa could see him sitting in his small office. In that room there was a phone hanging from a box, a desk and books, black files on the wall, but there was nothing to buy. All the things that one could buy were in the store itself; blankets and coloured cloths on shelves, cooking pots and billycans hanging from the rafters, open bags of grain with their tops curled down standing on the floor and in a glass case on the counter were tobacco, buns and sweets. Mashupa came slowly up to the counter and he looked into the office where Zamakulungisa was sitting in the chair that could swing round. He stood there for a long while, then at last Zamakulungisa looked around and it seemed that he did not recognize Mashupa.

'Sondela, come closer,' Zamakulungisa said. 'What do you want?'

'I want work, 'Nkosi.'

'Who are you?'

'I am Mashupa.'

'Mashupa who?'

'Mashupa of the family Ndizile.'

'Oh yes. Lezinyoni. The birds that fly. You're the one 'with the bad leg. Your wings are clipped!'

'Yes, 'Nkosi.'

'You never went to work on the mines.'

'No, 'Nkosi. I could not go. I saw all the others go and I was left here.'

'That's right, I remember now. How is your land?'

Now this was why Zamakulungisa was truly a friend. This was why he was known as the One-who-will-try-to-help. He always asked about the land or about the rain or about the youngest child. Of course he had remembered. It was just that he was busy there in his office. He remembered the last time when he had lent the two pounds for the bag of mealies and he knew the piece of land which they had to plough. He had even been there. He had passed right across the field one day when he was walking down to the sea.

'It is dry, 'Nkosi. It is dry and I cannot plough it with my two oxen. That is why I am here, 'Nkosi. I want to work so that I can

buy a pig and half a bag of grain for a lima party. My friends will bring their oxen and my land will be ploughed. . . .’

Mashupa stopped when he saw that Zamakulungisa had turned to his desk and that he had taken up a pencil. If only he too could work with a pencil, then he could help with all the work in the books.

‘What can you do?’ Zamakulungisa asked suddenly.

‘There is not much, ‘Nkosi. Only something that I can do with my hands.’

Mashupa held out his hands, palms up and Zamakulungisa turned in his swivel chair and looked at the old man. He sucked at the pencil for a while and then suddenly he spoke again.

‘Did you build your hut?’

‘My hut, ‘Nkosi?’

‘Yes, your own hut. Did you build it or did someone else?’

‘I built it, ‘Nkosi. My wife helped me with the walls and I put on the roof and I thatched it.’

‘Is it a neat hut?’

‘You have seen it, ‘Nkosi. One day you walked past it when you went down to Qomoto to fish.’

‘Qomoto beach?’

‘Yes, right above the beach, ‘Nkosi. On the top of the hill.’

‘Not where the bare patch is? The patch of sea sand spreading its way over the grass?’

‘No, ‘Nkosi. That is across the valley. I can see it from my home.’

‘How long did you take to build it?’

‘It was a long time ago, ‘Nkosi. I cannot remember too well.’

‘But it is a neat hut?’

‘Yes, ‘Nkosi.’

‘Half a bag of grain is worth a pound. How much is a pig big enough for a lima party?’

Mashupa could not understand this. First it was what can he do and then it was did he build his own hut. Of course he built his own hut. Who else would do it for him? Kwenkwana was too young then and Paul had gone long ago. And then it was about the bare patch that was creeping over the grass and anyhow that

was across the valley, not on his hill. And now it was a pound for half a bag of mealies, and how big must a pig be for a lima party!

'Some people kill an ox, 'Nkosi. But they have much land. It needs many ploughs and many oxen to plough the land and so they kill a beast and use more than a bag of grain for beer. My land is only a small piece.'

'Two pounds?'

'Two pounds for a pig, 'Nkosi? That would be a big enough pig. Yes, really it would be big enough. Two pounds. Yes, that would do it, 'Nkosi.'

'Listen, Mashupa,' Zamakulungisa said, 'the children need a little house to play in. Their toys lie all over their rooms. I want a place where they can go to and be out of the way. Perhaps a house like yours, not as big but made the same way. Mud walls, thatched roof. Can you do it?'

'A house like mine, 'Nkosi?'

'Smaller. Same shape, same material, but smaller. For the children. If you can do it I'll pay you three pounds. That will be one for the half bag of grain and two for the pig. Now go away and think about it.'

Zamakulungisa turned again to his desk and Mashupa shuffled out of the shop and went and sat down on the stoep to think about it. A hut for the children? A hut was a long job and a man usually made only one or two in his life. There was the cutting of the sods and of the poles for the roof. The gathering of grass for the thatching and string for the binding of it. There was cow-dung for the floor and a woman to smear it. Yet it would not be as big as his own hut. The tip of the roof only as high as a man.

Shixini's wife came out of the store and she carried a large packet. She gently lowered the packet to the floor, talking to herself as she did so.

'Those supplies are enough for a month,' Mashupa said and Shixini's wife laughed.

'Next week I will be here again.'

'Your husband is rich.'

'He has many cattle and his sons go out to work.'

'Do they work on the mines?'

'The mines! Not his sons. They work in a factory and the money is good.'

'Does he not miss his sons when the ploughing must start?'

'He has a lima party. Or he hires the tractor from Zamakulungisa.'

'My brother went away but my eldest son stays here to help me.'

'Why don't you have a lima party? I like lima parties.'

How it must feel to be rich! To have twenty head of cattle. To own an eight-blade plough and three wives. To have a lima party for the fun of it and to have cash to spend at the store. Or cash to pay Zamakulungisa for the use of his red tractor.

'My brother is also a rich man,' Mashupa said. 'He went away a long time ago and now he is rich.'

But Shixini's new wife was gathering up her goods and it seemed that she did not hear.

'He went away to work and he makes bicycles in a factory,' Mashupa continued. 'Just think of it! How he makes the bicycles that you see in the shop. Do you remember him? His name is Paul.'

'Paul?' the woman said, as she carefully raised the packet and placed it on her head. 'Who is Paul? Is he having a lima party?'

Then she walked away, her back straight, the paper packet of her possessions a proud crown. She walked swiftly, yet the packet balanced there and her neck moved accurately under the load as she covered the rough path. Mashupa watched her go and he decided that he must ask Shixini to the lima party. He went back into the store to tell Zamakulungisa that he would start tomorrow with the building of the small hut.

2

On the day of the lima party Mashupa and Kwenkwana were up with the sun. Kwenkwana took a sack and went to the back of the

hut and untied the pig. It had a riempie around one back leg and it tugged at the riempie as Kwenkwana pulled it away. At a corner of the field they stopped. Mashupa had brought his knife and, talking to the field so that it might bring forth in the coming season, he cut the pig's throat. Kwenkwana held the animal down and Mashupa let some of the blood flow on to the soil.

'May the seeds swell soon in the wet earth and may the cobs be firm this year,' Mashupa said, and Kwenkwana closed his eyes as he held the screaming pig. Mashupa looked at his son and a great pride welled up in him, for surely this young man would be blessed, surely the fields that he ploughed would produce! See, Paul! See this young man, my son who stays with me on the land. Have you such a friend to work with, have you a strong son to hold a pig while it is slaughtered?

They picked up the dead pig and placed it on the sack. They would carry it back, scrape it clean and then Nothandile would butcher it and she would make a large fire and the meat would be eaten in the afternoon.

The noise that the pig made brought Nothandile and Poto out of the hut and even Nowinile crawled outside. She stared at the blood that dripped from the sack and she stayed close to the hut wall.

'He is not very fat,' Nothandile said.

'He is a pig.'

'A thin pig and a thin season will follow.'

'And the beer?' Mashupa asked. 'How is the beer?'

'One cannot make much beer from half a bag. Not even half, for the pig ate some of it.'

'It will be enough. Ours is a small field.'

They did not eat that morning but they waited eagerly for their friends to come. Mashupa wondered how many oxen would be brought. Sixteen would be best, but eight would do. Shixini would bring two and Mapotiele two and Kobolo two. With his own, who knew the field, as leaders, they should have the job done in no time. Then they could all eat and drink and the next day he and Kwenkwana would begin to plant, for surely the rain of a week ago was the start of the rains that were late?

Mapotiele came first and then Kobolo and several young men looking for a party. Only Mapotiele brought two oxen and the young men laughed.

'How can you plough with only four oxen?' one of them asked. 'The ground is hard.'

'Shixini will come.'

'Shixini? Why should Shixini come? At his place there is always beer to drink and he has his new wife.'

'What do you know about these things?' Mashupa demanded. 'Why do you come here to talk this way?'

'Is it not a lima party? We will work a bit for our beer, but certainly we will not pull your plough for you!'

There was a shout from Kwenkwana, for dust could be seen far away, rising from the hooves of oxen driven along a dry path.

'There are four and a man drives them!' Kwenkwana shouted.

The oxen came over a rise and lumbered clumsily down a slope following the rough path that led to Mashupa's hut. Behind the four oxen a man ran. His stick swung above his head as he loped along at an easy pace. Even from the distance Kwenkwana could see that the oxen were heavy ones. Long straight horns they had and the thick flesh swung under their necks.

'They must be Shixini's,' he shouted.

When the oxen came closer Mashupa saw that they were red-coated Afrikanders and they were not Shixini's. They were Zamakulungisa's! They were the white man's best trek oxen and they came to his lands.

'Greetings from Zamakulungisa,' the herd boy said. 'He has sent these four beasts to help pull your plough and he has sent chains and four yokes. I am to stay with them until the work is done.'

'Welcome! Welcome! Come, let us inspan and let us start the work and the beer.'

It was not a span of sixteen. But at least there were eight and with the extra yokes that Zamakulungisa had sent and with these four fine beasts, eight would be enough. It would be a long day but the land would be ploughed.

Kwenkwana held the whip this time and Mashupa the handles

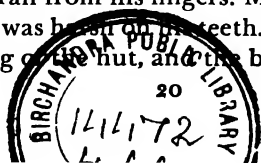
of the plough. Kwenkwana cracked the whip and the odd span moved forward. The blades dug in and Mashupa shouted joyfully as his land was turned by other men's oxen.

The first row was well done and the span turned at the far end of the field. Poto was leading and he stumbled to one knee for a moment as he swung round wide to turn the oxen, then he pulled again on the riempie and Mashupa straightened the plough and the blades dug in again. It was good to see the earth turn away from the plough and Mashupa leant heavily on the handles. He was happy that it was Kwenkwana who held the whip and Poto who was leading.

The plough bucked in his hands as a blade struck a stone. The stone was flicked away but Mashupa noticed now that two of the blades did not seem to be firm. They cut into the earth well enough but the line they left was not a neat one. The furrow was not even, and one blade seemed to twist slightly as it bit into the hard earth. It was an old plough, Paul's plough, but it had ploughed his field many times. It was old and it was heavy but surely it was not thinking of failing him at this moment?

When they turned for the third row the inside lead ox stumbled, clumsy on the broken earth. Poto stumbled too and again fell to his knees. He was up quickly, pulling on the riempie. Kwenkwana's whip cracked beneath the lead's belly and at that moment the whole span leant on their yokes and the plough, which had not turned completely at the end of the row, was twisted from Mashupa's hands. He saw a blade snap away from the main frame and then he fell forward as the plough was pulled from his hands. He shouted from the ground as the plough rattled away, sliding on its side over the unturned earth. The span hurried forward and Poto, to avoid the oxen's hooves, ran with it. He stopped the span a little further on and looked back to see what had happened.

Mashupa lay on the ground and he could smell the freshly turned earth. He clasped some of the soil in his right hand and he squeezed it but it would not pack into a hard lump. It only flaked away and ran from his fingers. Mashupa bit into the soil then and the grit was hard on his teeth. So it had let him down! After the building of the hut, and the buying and killing of the



pig, and the making of the beer, Paul's plough had let him down! It had given up and rattled away. Now how can the land be turned so that we may plant again?

Kwenkwana came up to him and Kobolo and Mapotiele too. They left their calabashes by the hut and they hurried over to him. Kwenkwana put his hands beneath his father's armpits and helped him to his feet.

'The blade snapped,' Mashupa said.

'The earth is too hard and the plough is too old,' Kobolo said. He spat at the earth then he looked back at the calabashes, cool and waiting for them near the hut.

'Perhaps we can fix it,' Kwenkwana said.

They walked over to the plough and Kwenkwana knelt down and examined the frame. Two bolts had sheared and he would need new ones and a spanner and even a new blade to fix the plough so that it could work again.

'It was Paul's plough,' Mashupa said. 'Paul left it to me when he went away.'

'It is broken,' Kobolo said. 'Whoever Paul is, it is broken.'

'Paul is my brother. He went away to the town many years ago. He said that the land was finished.'

'He did? He knew what he was saying, that brother of yours!'

'Perhaps Zamakulungisa could lend me a plough?' Mashupa said, turning to the herd boy who had brought the four oxen. 'He sent the oxen, perhaps he will lend me a plough?'

The boy shook his head and kicked at the plough.

'He does not lend a plough. You can hire the tractor perhaps. The red tractor can come another day and it will tear its way through this small field. In a morning the job will be done.'

Nothandile waited for Mashupa by the door of their hut. She did not hold out a calabash of beer for him. She did not suggest that they eat the pig although juicy pieces of its meat were grilling on the fire. The drum of beer was outside and its foam was thick and flaked with the coarse grain from which it had been made. When Mashupa told her that the plough had broken she did not say anything. She only looked at him and his weak leg seemed to throb and he felt the pain of it reach right up to his heart.

'He will have to get the red tractor,' Kobolo said and Nothandile turned and went back into the hut.

The next morning Mashupa could not rise early. He lay curled on his mat and he could smell around him the futility of the day before. He could smell the cold ash of the dead fire. He pulled the blanket over his head and tried to sleep again. But there were noises around the hut. Poto was up and Kwenkwana was outside and only Nothandile still lay near him on her mat. He reached out a hand and touched her shoulder but she did not move.

'It was a good party,' he said. 'The beer was cool and the pork was better than you thought.'

Nothandile was awake. She rolled over and threw her blanket from her.

'A good party! Kobolo and Mapotiele and those others! Eating and drinking and worrying me like that! A good party you say. It was to be a lima party. Remember? A lima party. Now what have you got? The pig is eaten, and the beer only bubbles in other men's stomachs and still we cannot plant when the rain comes.'

Mashupa sat up too and he shook his head. It was heavy and his brains seemed to rattle around inside like seeds in a dry melon.

'Still, it was a good party.'

'Again! It is the beer that makes you talk like this. Later you will have to think. How can I have the plough fixed? How can I borrow oxen? How can I plough my miserable piece of land?'

'It is our land, Nothandile. You should not talk of it that way.'

'Our land! Yes, our miserable piece of land that is too barren and too small to feed us. You would have your sons die on it too, just like the others that have died. It is sick, the land, and it will not feed us.'

Outside, in the field, Kwenkwana looked at the plough and he removed the broken blade. When his father emerged from the hut he took the blade to him and pointed to the worn holes through which the bolts had passed.

'They must have been loose for a long time,' he said.

Mashupa took the blade and turned it over and he felt the edge with his thumb. Then he threw it on the ground and looked at his son.

'Your mother says the land is sick. It will not feed us.'

'We must plough, father.'

'Even if we do plough, the mealies that the field will bring will not feed us.'

'The rain must come and we must plough.'

Kwenkwana hung his head and he moved his bare foot to and fro, making an arc in the dry sand. Mashupa smiled and reached out a hand and placed it on his son's shoulder. He was a good man, this elder son of his. A good strong fellow, and look how he was growing up and look too how he cared for the land, how he knew that the ploughing must be done. See this fine boy, Paul, though your plough has broken, still he knows that somehow we will do it!

'Yes, son, we must plough. But how, son, how do we do it? The pig is eaten and the beer is gone. Also the plough is broken.'

'I know a way, father. It was talking last night with those friends of Kobolo's.'

'Tell me!'

Kwenkwana knew that it would be difficult to tell his father. He was a good man but life had flowed past him for so long that now he only saw the huge logs that came down in the floods. He did not notice the steady flow of smaller things, he did not hear people talk. His mind lived a life that had gone long ago. When his brother had left to find the new world, Mashupa had stayed. He had stayed on the land and truly he had stopped on the land. While the stream flowed on past him Mashupa sat on a small island and only grew older. He talked about his brother, he limped on his one bad leg and he did not feel the swirling river pass by him.

'Father,' Kwenkwana said, 'things are changing today. The land is sick, just as mother says. More and more people are going away to learn to work in the factories because soon there will be towns in Pondoland and factories around the towns. Pondoland will be ours and the towns will be ours and we will not need to live off the land that is sick. We will be able to work in the

factories and live in the towns and bring money home at the end of each week. The white man will only stay here if we say he can. His stores will be bought by one of us and we will buy the mealies and sell them and we will own the tractor. Even last week there was a big meeting at Bìlana and these things will come soon because it is right that we should have our own land and our own towns and our own factories. Zamakulungisa himself will have to leave this place. He will have to sell his store and leave this place.'

Mashupa could hardly believe that it was his son who was saying these things. How could Zamakulungisa leave! Where would they all be if Zamakulungisa left? Who would feed them in times of famine and who would lend them money in times of need? Where could one buy sugar and salt, and who would send the red tractor so that the land could be ploughed if all else failed? As for the other nonsense—the towns and the factories—what had happened to his son?

'Who has been telling you these things?'

'Everyone knows them, father, everyone except yourself. You still work for Zamakulungisa and you still go to see him in his office. You still take his money and remember, he even sent his cattle to help you plough.'

'He is a good man! He has helped us, always he helps us.'

'And yet if you borrow money you must pay half a crown for every month for every pound that you borrow. That is wrong. That is too much.'

'His money must grow. When he cannot use it himself it must grow for him. It has always been that way.'

'Yes, father, it has always been that way but soon it will stop. Everyone says so.'

Mashupa could not believe that this was Kwenkwana. Perhaps it was only the beer last night and the talk of fools. And yet was it not Kwenkwana who had always said we must plough? We must wait for the rains, father, but we must plough. '

'Why then do you always say that we must plough?'

Kwenkwana had held his head high while he spoke but now he dropped it again. His father would have to know and yet it was so hard to tell him. He had hoped that the field would be

ploughed and that Poto could help with the planting but then the plough had broken.

'Father. I am going to find Paul, my uncle, and I am going to find work in the town. I have arranged with Shixini. He has lent me the money so that I might go. Later on, when there are factories built down here in Pondoland, I will come back. First I will learn how to work in a factory, and then I will come back here. But soon I am going.'

'Shixini! You borrowed from Shixini!'

'He has the money, father. And it is better to borrow from him than from Zamakulungisa.'

'You will leave me and go to find my brother?'

'I will look for him, father, and where he works I too will find work.'

'The ploughing, how will I do it now? The land, Kwenkwana! What of the land?'

'For five pounds Zamakulungisa will plough it with his red tractor.'

'Five pounds! Where can I get five pounds?'

Kwenkwana slowly pulled a small bag from inside his belt. It was a cloth bag like those in which men like to keep their tobacco. He opened the top of the pouch and he took out a large note folded small. This he opened out to its full size and he handed it to his father.

Mashupa knew, as soon as Kwenkwana pulled out the pouch, that really he had forgotten the things that mattered most. About the towns and the factories and going away. All he had said was where could he find five pounds. That was not what he meant. He meant to say to his son that the things that were boiling in his young mind were crazy things. He meant to say that it was madness to leave home. He meant to say that he should not go, that he should not have spoken to Shixini. He meant to make his son think, think how much more he was needed here than up there at the factory. Whose son was he! Mashupa's, Mashupa's son, not Paul's! Mashupa's son and a fine strong man who felt for the land and who said so firmly—We must plough, father! Now this son, this same young man, held out five pounds so that the red tractor might come.

'Take it, father,' Kwenkwana said. 'I have arranged everything with Shixini because I had thought that by today the ploughing would be over. So you must take it for I will not be here to help. I shall take my blanket and a little food and then I must go. Take this money, father. I will find my uncle Paul and I will also work in the factory. The tractor will plough for you and Poto will help you plant.'

3

If a man's legs and a man's heart are strong they lead him away from the land. It will always be that way.

Old Paul looked out of the kitchen window and he saw the washing hanging out to dry on the backyard line. With a small knife he scraped at a carrot and when he thought of his son and of the freshness of the young man's brains the knife dug deeper. His hands held the carrot and the knife quite still, and he could see, over the backyard fence, an old man wheeling a cart in the street. The old man collected bottles in his cart; he shuffled behind it, the pockets of his tattered dinner-jacket stuffed with newspapers and his hopeful cry rang familiar through the tree-lined avenues of Parktown. Beyond the flap-flash of a white sheet in the sunshine Old Paul saw not a man with a cart but his limping brother following behind a plough.

Old Paul tried to remember his brother, he tried to remember the shape of his face and his shuffling walk. Perhaps there were other Ndiziles now. Perhaps Mashupa had found a wife. A heathen Pondo woman she would be, with a red blanket and hanging breasts. Perhaps she had produced a son and perhaps the son toiled too in the field and perhaps the son's legs were strong. Would he too walk away from the land and from the toil?

For sure his own son would not set out in the same way, with his hands as his only tools! Young Paul would have knowledge

beyond that of the land and of oxen and of ploughs. He would know men other than those who lived in fear of the spirits of their ancestors and in constant hope for a good crop. He would not set out with a stick and some food and a blanket. *His* son would have a pen and a book and a head full of the wisdom of the schools that he and Mary had paid for. Yes, Paul's journey would be different!

Hamilton, the garden boy, came into the kitchen bringing the day's post. His fingers fumbled with the envelopes and he picked out one that was not addressed to Baas van Staden. Respectfully he handed the post to Old Paul, the strange letter on top of the small pile. Old Paul wiped his hands on his apron and took the letters.

'There is one for you,' Hamilton said, and Old Paul looked at the writing then slipped the letter quickly into the pocket of his apron. The others he put carefully on the window-sill.

'See if there are some bottles for the old man,' Old Paul said and Hamilton went outside again.

Old Paul always had great trouble getting through a hand-written letter. When Paul wrote from the Mission School he wrote in neat capitals. But Mary! Mary's writing was the most difficult of all, and one had to sit down and read it carefully and slowly for when Mary wrote, though she wrote badly, there was always something that she wanted to say. How was it that letters only brought the big news? The other smaller news you heard when people spoke to you. But a letter, and a letter from Mary!

The envelope containing Mary's letter lay precious in his apron pocket as he cooked lunch for the van Stadens. There would be four for lunch. Mrs van Staden and Koos and Koos's two friends. Willie had laid the table and Old Paul wondered if he could perhaps steal out to his room and read his letter. He heard the front door slam and he knew that there would not be time.

'That will be Baas Koos,' he said to Willie. 'Go and ring the bell.'

Willie put on his white gloves and hung his waiter's band over his shoulder. Then he went through to the dining-room.

After the meal had been served and the table cleared, Old Paul called in Hamilton from the garden to help wash up. Hamilton and Willie worked cheerfully together and Old Paul would be able to read his letter. He went outside into the back-yard, sat down on a small stool that stood against the wall of his room and looked up at the sky for a moment. It was a pleasant warm day and it was Friday. The coming weekend was his week-end off and Paul would be here and now in his pocket was a letter from Mary. What could she want that could not wait till he saw her? He took the letter from his apron pocket, examined the front of it as he always did, the address, the handwriting, the stamp and the post mark, then he looked at the back of the letter. There was nothing written there. He turned it on end and carefully tore away a strip of the envelope. He hoped that Mary had not written too fast. When she wrote fast it was difficult to read. He hoped she had been careful and he was ashamed that he could not read fast writing. Yet he was also proud that he could at least read. He had taught himself, with Mary's help. They had laughed over his efforts. He smiled as he remembered those days in the little house in Mofolokohlo. He removed the letter from its envelope and carefully opened it.

Baas Koos came to the back door and shouted for him. Old Paul quickly put the letter away again and got up and hurried to the door where Baas Koos stood, leaning against the lintel, holding the swing door open with his huge arm.

'Paul, when is Paulie due back?'

'Tomorrow, Baas Koos.'

'What's he going to do?'

'I don't know, Baas Koos.'

'The master has found a job for him.'

'That is good. He will need a job.'

'The master says it's a good job in a library.'

'I will tell him when he comes, Baasie. It is good of the master to think of him. A library! That too is good.'

'We'll see him tomorrow then.'

'Yes, tomorrow.'

Mrs van Staden's shrill voice came from the stoep.

'Koose, coffee.'

'The master says that Paulie is being spoilt at the Mission School,' Koos said, 'it is time he went to work!'

Koos left with a laugh and the door slammed. Old Paul went back to his stool.

Paul was being spoilt! How could that be? When he could read so well and write! He could talk English and his own language, and Afrikaans too. How can he be spoilt, that strong young man with his head screwed on the right way? Perhaps Mary's letter had something to say about that. Perhaps Mary too is worried that her son is being spoilt. He took out the letter again and began to read.

'Oh Paul-who-is-away, I wait only to see you and our son, but here today comes a young man whose name is also Ndizile. Kwenkwana Ndizile. He says he comes from your home and your brother is his father. Mashupa, the one with the bad leg. He says he came to look for you in the factory so that he might also make bicycles. I have told him that I am writing this and you will be prepared when you come to Mofolokohlo. I wait to see you this weekend, oh Paul. He is a fine young man but I think he has dropped his blanket only yesterday.'

Business has been good this week. How is the cooking in Johannesburg?

*It is me whom you know,
Mary Mopeli.'*

Mashupa! Mashupa-shupa, the one who shuffles along! How long ago was it that he wrote that letter? When he was proud that he had the good job in the factory. He didn't even write it himself. Mary had put it down for him. 'I have a job making bicycles in Vereeniging and I live in a house.'

He had known that his brother would be envious so why had he asked for that letter to be written? He was proud, proud of the job and of the money and he wanted to tell them at home that he had found a place for himself. And was it not true that he had indeed found a place? But it was not the same. Now it was not the same. It was not starting at seven and finishing at five. Working to the whistle with all the others. Here there was work until way into the night and in the early morning too. How

quickly time rushes past and how quickly a man grows older! How do the fields yield down there and are the rains still late?

Always the rains were late and always the young men went out to work, leaving the fields. He himself had done it. He too had taken up his small bundle and he had thrown away his blanket so that his new khaki shorts hung low and the sharp edges of the cheap cloth worried his thighs as he walked away from the land . . .

The sun was warm and Mary's letter hung from Old Paul's hand. He thought with longing of her and of their life in Mofolokohlo. He thought of the money that they now earned, each in their own way. She in her small business near the factory and he scraping carrots and cooking for the van Stadens. Before it had been better than this. Working at the bicycle factory had been better. Those were the best years, long ago when Paul was born.

Mary had a tea-cart which stood on its metal wheels under the blue-gum trees near the factory. The grass grew around the spokes for Mary had no need to move. She was there every day inside her tea-shed, leaning on the shelf and looking out of the opening that was the serving hatch and talking cheerfully to the workers. From where she stood she could touch all the sides of her tea shop and nothing was out of reach. She owned a small radio which stood on the counter at lunch time so that music came from the tea shop. It was a bright, happy place.

And then he had lost the job at the factory. He had walked alone from house to house in a fine part of the town where children played and clean dogs barked at him. He had gone around to each back door asking for work.

In one backyard there was a small boy playing with a tiny car. He looked up at Old Paul and smiled.

'Hello,' he said. 'What do you want?'

'I want work, Baasie.'

'What kind of work do you do?'

'I will do any kind of work. In the master's garden perhaps. I can dig holes and cut the grass. Chop these logs for your fire.'

'We had a boy called Joseph once, but he's gone. What's your name?'

'My name is Paul.'

'Mine's Koos. Would you like some tea and bread?'

'Thank you, Koos, I would like some tea and bread.'

Koos had fetched bread and a tin mug from the kitchen.

'Will water do?'

'Water will be very fine. I am a thirsty man.'

They had sat in the backyard on two short sawn logs and talked together.

'I'm eight,' Koos said. 'How old are you?'

'Hau, Baasie, I'm old now. Look at the specks in my beard . . .'

Paul thrust his chin out and with Mary's letter he scratched at the hard stubble. Even then it had been true, there had already been a greyness there . . .

'Have you got any children?'

'Yes, I have one small boy, just about the same size as you.'

'What's his name?'

'Paul.'

'Yours is Paul too.'

'Isn't that good, to have the same name as your father?'

'Can Paul come and play with me? I think you would be a good boy to work here.'

And indeed that was how it had turned out. Old Paul went to work for the van Stadens and Paul played with Koos. Old Paul did not write to tell his brother about it for it seemed that the work was not as noble as work in the factory.

Perhaps it was not noble work but it was work, and it was in Vereeniging. He could go to Mofolokohlo on his day off and he could see Mary and he could watch his own son grow. He could bring Paul to the house and for a long time the two young boys, Paul Ndizile and Koos van Staden played together in the backyard. They grew up, good friends, and Old Paul was happy when he could hear them laughing. He could still hear their laughter rising muffled from their 'mine' in the backyard. It was always dark and a little cold in the mine. There were shadows on the side wall and the two boys used to crouch over candles which were stuck fast in their own wax to the top of a wooden box. One could see little pieces of root sticking out of the wall. They made thin shadows against the red earth. The beams above were dark and strong to hold the soil that hid their roof, and moisture

collected on the cold tin ceiling. There was a smell of the earth in their mine and Old Paul remembered the feel of excitement and the cheerful welcome when he brought scones to them from the van Stadens' kitchen.

Later things had changed at the house in Vereeniging. Mr van Staden was an important man and dinners at the house became more frequent. Old Paul cooked these dinners but now nothing was right. The gravy was not brown enough, the chickens were too tough, the rolls were cold. Then there was too much talking in the kitchen and Paulie must not come inside with Baas Koos. He could stay in the kitchen, with the others. Koos shouldn't spend all his time playing with piccanins. And yet, sometimes late at night, after dinner, little Paul would be called into the lounge so that the people might see him. Old Paul must iron his white suit more often. The kitchen must be clean. Look at the fat there around the stove! Look at the ceiling! And then Mr van Staden, who was growing richer now, with new and longer cars and louder and louder friends, told Old Paul that the family was moving to Johannesburg. Old Paul, the cook-boy, was to come too.

Old Paul had told Mary and Mary had cried a little, but because of their son and because of the house and Mary's business she could not leave Mofolokohlo. Together they decided that Old Paul must go alone, for Paul had to continue at school and it was not wise to move a child from his school. Old Paul was earning good money with the van Stadens, but the earnings of both of them were needed for the house and for Paul's schooling and for clothes.

Mary's letter fell from Old Paul's hand and he bent to pick it up. He read it again, slowly, as he always did, his mouth moulding the words. 'I think he has dropped his blanket only yesterday. . . .'

Dropped his blanket and left it there in a dark hut and set out alone to find work. Set out from Pondoland with new khaki shorts and a shirt and with what hope in his heart? Set out to find his uncle Paul! Yes, that was it! He had remembered the letter and he had searched for a factory in Vereeniging that made bicycles and he had found it. They must have remembered him

there at the factory. After all these years they remembered him! They remembered too that he had lived in Mofolokohlo with Mary Mopeli, the woman who owned a tea-cart. They had sent the young man to Mary and that way he had found her. But what about work? He had not found work and what sort of work could such a young man do? With only his hands. No pen, no head full of the cleverness from the school, only his hands. Could such a young man find work in a library as his own son would do?

In a library! With rows of books and hushed people! Paul would work in such a place and in this way their hope would be fulfilled. Tomorrow Paul would arrive and together they would go to Mofolokohlo and Mary would laugh out loud and throw her arms around her son and Paul would hug her and soon everyone would see that he had not been spoilt down there. Spoilt! Look at him! He wears a suit and a clean shirt and a tie when he works and see how easily a man who has been to the Mission School earns money. We have helped him to work with his brains, Mary, not just his hands as this young Kwenkwana must do.

4

Paul lay on his bed in the dormitory and stared up at the rafters and at the tin roof.

'Sometimes the juice comes,' he said.

'It's there or it isn't. There's no more to it.'

'If it comes you can lay it down line after line. Like a man painting dots on a road.'

'I've seen them. They walk backwards, their legs apart.'

'When the juice comes the thing is to keep moving. Like running when you're fit. You can keep going.'

'And if you're not fit you only limp along.'

'That's it. That's when you're in trouble.'

Paul hoped it would not be like that today.

'Ralitapula,' he said, 'I hope it's not like that today.'

'Juiceless Tuesday, Paul.'

'Ralitapula! You belong in Teyateyaneng. You belong in the hills. Fishing for yellows in the Malibamatso. Warm in a hut during a mountain snowstorm, that's the place for Ralitapula!'

'You make me homesick!'

'At Fort Haven you should find yourself another name.'

'Like yours? Paul, because your father was Paul. Paul Ndizile, the Ndiziles who fly like birds. What's so wonderful about that?'

'Paul is short. You don't need to explain it.'

'You all say Rali for short.'

'My friend the Potato!'

Ralitapula turned on his side and he reached for a secret packet of cigarettes tucked away in the small bedside cupboard which they shared. There was a box of matches there too and Ralitapula lit two cigarettes, cupping his hands over the bright flash of the match. He handed one to Paul.

'Thanks. What time is it?'

Ralitapula pulled on his cigarette and held his watch up close to its end.

'Five o'clock.'

The forbidden cigarettes glowed in the darkness and there were sounds of waking in the dormitory.

'Rali,' Paul said, 'can it really be true?'

'We've got to write, boy. That's for sure.'

'Today. Two papers of three hours each.'

'That's what he says.'

'Just six hours.'

'Hell, it's enough!'

'But only the two of us, Rali. Sitting there in the hall writing for six hours!'

'Old Puff Adder will be there. He'll sit up at the top and correct papers or something.'

'He'll watch us. He'll watch how we look up at the clock. How we write with our heads down. He'll walk around to stretch his legs. His heels will click on the floor and the juice will dry up. Qhit! Just like that!'

'Qua! Not this time!'

'It will! I've felt it before. Stomach gets it first!'

'Please, Puff Adder, will you stop pacing around for Christ's sake,' Rali mimed, holding his hand up in the darkness. 'It dries up Ndizile's juice. Can't you slide? Like a snake?'

'What if we don't make it?' Paul whispered.

'There's a good job for you. Paul Ndizile, Matric First Class. Primary School Teacher. Black suit and a case full of text books!'

'That's what they'd like.'

'That's all they ever wanted of a black man. Come out of school and teach your own people. Who goes further? Who goes beyond the simple schoolboy stuff we learn here, and who charges at life to make something of it for himself? Not the teachers. The teachers teach future teachers! Where the hell does that get you? You plough over and over the same old ground, waiting and waiting for something to shoot up out of it, something strong and self-willed so that you can point to it and say—Look! I taught that! I *taught* it. Not I *am* it. It will be a strong-willed favourite of yours, a fine pupil, and through it you will live and hope as you should have done much earlier for yourself.'

'I'll never teach,' Paul said.

'But your father would be so proud of you!'

Yes, father would be proud. A cook-boy in a Johannesburg home with a son who was a teacher. Look, there, that is my son. Umfundisi. He has flown out of the kitchen window and away.

'Not for me, Rali. Something else for me.'

'For you the big throw, maybe?'

Ralitapula swung his legs out of the blankets and from a small black box in the cupboard he took a pair of dice.

'Come seben come leben,' he said to the dice; then he threw them on the floor in the darkness.

'That's my throw,' Paul said. 'Better look at it.'

Ralitapula lit a match and crouched down between the two beds. One dice lay near Paul's shoes. It was a five. The other had rolled under the small cupboard. Ralitapula reached under the cupboard with the lighted match. With his head close to the floor he could see the way the dice lay.

'Six,' he shouted. He jumped on to Paul's bed and someone in the dormitory cursed. 'That's the big throw, Paul boy! The big

throw. You won't be a teacher, but what the hell will you be? Tell me, now in the early morning while the dark still lets you dream.'

'Perhaps I'll follow in my father's footsteps! Yes missus, no missus, next time remember put salt missus.'

Ralitapula went back to his own bed laughing, but Paul felt a twinge of guilt. He joked in the early morning while Old Paul dreamed, no doubt, of the bright future he would share with his son. Paul nipped off the end of his cigarette, dropping the ash carefully into his shoe. He turned over on his side pulling the blankets up to his ears.

'That wasn't my throw, Rali,' he mumbled. 'It was yours. Those dice talk to you.'

'Want to know why, Paul? Want to know why they talk to me?'

'I've heard it before. Let's get some sleep.'

'Of course, you've heard it before.'

Ralitapula picked up the little black box and he held it in both hands. The dice lived in the box, side by side, with the knuckle bones of a child. The bones are scraped clean and the child died up there in the Malutis, close to the River Malibamatso, and the doctors took pieces of her and from it came the power and the pride of a nation.

'My father gave me those knuckles,' Rali said. 'He was the most powerful man in the Malutis.'

'Sometimes you give me the creeps!'

Paul turned over again, covering his head this time.

'You know how they kill them when they need them for a ritual? Shall I tell you, Paul?'

'For Christ's sake shut up.'

'They choose carefully when there is a child to be chosen,' Ralitapula droned in the darkness. 'They watch for many days, then they wait for her and she does not return home one night. She is bound there and she is held by the power of it and slowly she dies. She dies slowly before they kill her. Then they kill her, neatly, as it should be done. When my father died they took every piece of him and they hid it. No one knows where he is. He said to me before he died, watch for the coming of a she-child, a daughter of death!'

He drew again on the cigarette and Paul, never quite sure how much his friend was joking, peered from beneath his blanket and watched the tiny light flicker in the man's eyes and then die.

'A young girl,' Ralitapula said, 'a young girl who will come to me and I shall show her the bones of another young girl and she will lie down for me in the darkness.'

'You'll be a bloody witch-doctor, that's what you'll be!'

Paul turned over again, but Ralitapula was out of the bed in a flash. He stripped away Paul's blankets and leapt on to his bed shrieking madly. He pulled the pillow from beneath Paul's head and hit him with it.

'Get dressed, man, we're going for a walk.'

'Get off me,' Paul said.

Someone cursed again and bedsprings creaked as others in the dormitory were woken by the noise.

They were up early on the last day of term. The grass was damp and the mist still hung in the valley. They walked silently towards the stream and when they got there the sky was light and birds were busy. Ralitapula checked his three night lines and on one of them was a large eel.

'Breakfast!' he said. 'Look at the size of the bugger!'

'Shall we cook him here?' Paul suggested. 'I've got matches.'

'Now that's the juice for you! That's the right idea at the right time. That's genius!'

Along the banks of the stream trees grew, and Paul and Ralitapula broke off dry branches and soon they had a fire going. With a sliver of sharp slate Ralitapula picked at the skin around the eel's head. The eel still squirmed, wrapping itself around Ralitapula's arm. He folded the skin back until he could get a grip of it around the stick which he held in his hand. Paul held the head and Ralitapula pulled on the skin. It peeled away neatly, like a glove from a finger. Then Ralitapula threaded a green stick through the quivering body of the eel and this he stuck into the ground so that the eel would hang over the fire. The body was too heavy for the stick and it sagged into the flames. Ralitapula quickly broke another branch and supported

the eel's head. Paul crouched by the fire listening to the fat sizzle as it dripped from the white flesh.

'Poor bugger,' Paul said. 'He wasn't even dead.'

But he was dead now and his flesh turned whiter as he cooked. Fat bubbled and popped from him and Ralitapula spread the coals so that their early breakfast would not cook too quickly. Paul wandered away until he found two flat stones for plates and he returned with these.

The sun rose while they waited and at six o'clock the bell rang in the Mission tower.

'He's cooked,' Ralitapula said, taking out the green stick.

They picked at the smooth white flesh of the fresh-cooked eel. The sound of the bell from the tower was a well-known one but today it did not ring out its usual command. Today was a different day, and on a day like this what can be done to two senior students who had already brought honour to the school?

'They haven't had two firsts in years,' Ralitapula said.

'Old Puff Adder will be taking roll call.'

'Someone will answer for us. Lereng—here! Ndizile—here!'

'Poor Old Puff Adder. We'd better be in time for chapel. This is his great day.'

The stream by which they sat was not a strong one. It came down from the bush that clung to the cool peak of Intabamhlope, the White Hill, and it wound its way through the fields until it ran into the River Makwe. It was not a strong stream, but it was a cool and friendly one. Often in summer, Paul had swum in it and after the late rains it was swollen and the grass that clung to its banks was combed into smooth lines by the flood. Then one could jump into the stream, high up near Intabamhlope and float down with the flood. But now, before the rains, the stream only trickled around smooth black rocks and eels hid in the pools.

Where the stream joined the Makwe, Paul and Ralitapula had built a hut. It was a small rock-walled, thatch-roofed hut like those that were made in Basutoland, and it stood at the confluence of the two rivers, facing the water. On Sundays, sometimes, when it was raining, Paul and Ralitapula sat in their hut and they smoked secretly in the dry comfort and watched the river growing muddy from the draining fields. The smoke from their

fire seeped up through the thatch and it clung, like mist to a warm haystack, wispy and hesitant as if the hut itself were smouldering. On such days it was good to sit and smoke, friends together on the bank of the river. It was good to talk of the future and to wonder what they would both find for themselves when they left the Mission.

It was a proud school. Founded many years before by the Scots. Oaks grew in its grounds, huge and spreading and incongruous. For there are not many oaks in this part of the country, only those few planted by traders or by missionaries who wanted the familiar strength of the huge trees to watch over them while they toiled so far from home. Oaks were not the only things that the missionaries planted. They planted too, a seed of civilization which, unlike the oak, did not always grow huge and spreading. There were too many strange and warring influences in the new land and the old barbarity and the old suspicion and fear cut ruthlessly into the young saplings and often they wilted and died.

'Have you ever thought,' Paul said, as he sucked at the juicy head of the eel, 'why Old Puff Adder stays here at Fort Haven, teaching strange kids with names like Lereng and Ndizile. Why does he do it?'

Ralitapula walked over to the stream to wash his hands.

'How should I know,' he said, talking to the stream. 'It's his life, I suppose. He's a missionary!'

He came back wiping his mouth on the back of his wet hand.

'He likes teaching strange kids. He likes the feeling of . . . of philanthropy. Now there's a word for you! He feels good, Paul. That's all. He just feels good teaching kids.'

'And today when he gives that farewell speech what does he feel when he sees the kids walking away for ever?'

'Christ, Paul! It's the early morning shivers you've got. Ask him!' Ralitapula tapped the imaginary Puff Adder on the shoulder and addressed him in his best mission English. 'Tell me, Old Puff Adder, how do you feel now that it's all over for us? Feel sad, Old Puff?'

'He will be sad,' Paul said. 'He's a good man and he's probably lonely.'

'Oh for Christ's sake! Let's get back.'

In fact Old Puff Adder was not staying to teach kids with names like Lereng and Ndizile. He had had enough. He had seen the clouds building up and he had felt the piercing strength of the new lightning. He had held a hand up to ward it off but to no avail. Education was a weapon. He had himself used the weapon, but now, he said, the weapon had fallen into evil hands. Now they would grasp the young and push them mercilessly into the mould that had been prepared for them. Now there was inferior education to perpetuate inferior status. It was un-Christian, it was evil, and the work that the Mission school had done throughout the years was to be destroyed.

Old Puff Adder could puff. He blew red and excited when he touched on these things and some members of the Mission Board shook their heads rather sadly, waiting for the day when Puff Adder would finally burst. But he didn't burst. He bubbled and hissed and he fumed, but he didn't burst.

'Gentlemen,' he said, on that final Speech Day, 'we are living through trying times. The ogre of our day is racialism. It has an ugly head and it is stronger now than at any time during the history of Fort Haven Mission School. It is growing, gentlemen, it is breathing its evil breath into the lives of good men 'and I will not stay to see it triumph.'

Whether or not Old Puff Adder was doing the right thing, whether or not he should have stayed to do battle with his ogre, was really immaterial because the Board was glad to see him go. He had been a difficult old man, a good principal, but a fiery difficult old man. God knew it was hard enough keeping a Mission School going these days without the old man's periodic outbursts.

Old Puff Adder planned to go and, as Paul said, he was a lonely man. Before he left he made one last gesture, one last effort to establish a living memorial to his own liberal ideals. One last blow at his ogre it was, a final puff against strong winds before departing.

Secretly and alone, without the knowledge of the Board, but with the eager help of an old acquaintance in Johannesburg, he arranged for this year's two best pupils, Paul Ndizile and Rali-

tapula Lereng, to write a final examination which could lead to scholarships to the University of the Witwatersrand.

They had written it and today before the whole school the two young men would be honoured. The Pondo and the Basuto would be sent off on a fruitful rewarding life, carrying with them Puff Adder's and God's blessing.

5

There was an extra bed in Old Paul's room, a low table and two chairs. A wooden box stood by each bed, upturned, shelves nailed inside. From a rail across one corner hung Old Paul's two suits, plastic-covered and pressed. A hessian curtain hid this corner and on the floor below the suits were two pairs of shoes, one black with white toes, the other patterned brown. An unshaded bulb hung from the centre of the roof and the wires that fed it were tacked neatly to the roof beams. The bed that Old Paul occupied was covered by a white quilt and on his pillow lay an embroidered linen cloth. Its edges were red and, entwined in elaborate stitch in the centre, were the words PAUL NDIZILE—FLY HOME. On the other bed lay a strapped suitcase and Paul sat at the end of this bed, his elbows resting on his knees. His fingertips tapped as he spoke to his father.

'There are two of us, father. My friend Ralitapula Lereng, and myself. It really is true. We will both live at a place called Dougal House. It is a residence for Africans.'

'So you will not be staying with me?'

'Just till term starts, father.'

'When is that?'

'In February.'

'And your friend? Where will he stay?'

'In Sweet Meadows.'

'And when the term starts you will both go together to the University.'

'That is it, father.'

'And the job that has been arranged for you in the library? You can work amongst books, my son, is that not what you want? You could earn money in that job too.'

'I cannot take the job if I take the scholarship, and the scholarship is one chance in a lifetime.'

Old Paul considered the chances that a man had in a lifetime and he thought of a room full of books and of the many ways of earning money.

'You will need money at the University.'

'Only for books and clothes and things.'

'It has been like that for many years, my son. For clothes and books and things. I had thought perhaps it was over now, perhaps our job had been done, perhaps your mother and I could rest a while when our son was finished with the school!'

'It will only be three more years, father.'

'Ah yes, Paul, only three more years. But what is money when there is talk of the University?'

Old Paul did not often use the word University. He knew the place, that was true. He had often walked past it. There were huge grey buildings on top of a hill and one of them was a library. There were large pillars and steps on which people sat. At night lights shone on the pillars and sometimes Mr and Mrs van Staden went there to see a play or to hear the singing. It was a grand place, the University. Baas Koos would himself be going next year. That was as it should be. The University is the place for rich men's sons. It is a big place. Pillars and lights. Who knew what went on inside there and who was he to talk of it? How could one jump across a stream when one does not know the thickness of the grass on the other side?

'I will try to earn some money during the holidays,' Paul said, and Old Paul only shook his head and smiled.

'These things are on the other side of the stream, my son. I stand here with moving water between me and the other side. I cannot jump across.'

Paul got up from the bed and he crouched there in front of his father and he placed his hands on his father's knees.

'But I can, father! I can! And it is because of you that I can. You made the ground firm under my feet so that I can leap!'

The pressure of his son's hand was pleasant on his knee and Old Paul smiled.

'But this scholarship, son? What is this part of it that one does not pay for? All the things that a man gets that are worth getting, he pays for!'

Paul stood up and he held out his hands in front of him, up-turned as if weighing something that lay there.

'Well, it's a kind of competition, father, and the prize in the competition is the money for University. We all write tests—just like the tests we did at the end of every year. You remember how you and mother worried about the results of those tests. Would I move up the next year or not? Remember? And every time I managed to grab it. Grab each reward which was then another year of school.'

Paul closed his fists and he held the right one tight-gripped.

'Remember, father?'

'Each year was nearer to the last one,' Old Paul said. 'The last one you already hold in your hand. I did not know that there was further to go.'

'But think, father, just think how far there is to go. Lereng is to be a doctor! I am going to work on a newspaper!'

Old Paul looked up at his son, suddenly suspicious.

'What have newspapers to do with this?'

'I can write, father! I will take a course in the Arts faculty, then I will work on a newspaper. You always said that it was best to work with a pen!'

'Yes, I have said that.'

'Well then? Isn't this what you wanted? Isn't it, father? You sound as if you don't approve!'

Approve! Why did his son use such words? One must approve and then agree. Approve of a job in a library and then agree that it be taken. But how could one approve when the things to be agreed upon were outside one's own judgment? Before approving you had to understand. You had to know what it meant to disapprove. You had to know that it mattered which way you decided, and how could it matter if you did not know what the

decision was about? You had to feel that each side had been weighed carefully so that for sure one hand was heavier. How could he weigh these things and what did his son mean?

'It is not for me to approve, my son,' he said. 'It is only for me to try to understand. You have moved so far, and I have stayed so much behind, I can only watch you as you go further.'

Old Paul stood up and he took his son's hand and he smiled and gripped the hand tightly as he shook it.

'Paul Ndizile! It is a good strong name! You have a long way to fly, Paul, but my wings are clipped now and I must stay on the ground.'

'It was you who flew away first, father,' Paul said. 'It was you who left Pondoland and came to work and made money and it was you and my mother who taught me. Without you I would have no wings.'

They spoke in Xhosa and the words were soft between them. Too soft, the young man thought, and he was glad when his father turned away saying that he would go to the kitchen and fetch them some tea.

The two Pauls caught the train to Vereeniging and the father was proud to travel with the son. Old Paul wore his best suit and his son wore grey flannels and a sports coat that was a little too long. The coat had leather at the elbows, and Paul wondered why his son did not buy a suit just like his own.

'I have some money in the Post Office,' he said. 'Perhaps I could help you to buy a suit for the first term.'

Paul laughed and led his father to a seat. The train was crowded and when it moved away people jostled against one another. Paul remained standing and his father looked up from his seat.

'It was lucky that the young man found your mother,' he said.

'Yes. He could have wandered anywhere.'

'It was lucky too that they remembered me at the factory.'

'Yes, father.'

'Just think of it! He comes to the factory straight from Pondoland, he finds the one that makes bicycles in Vereeniging and he

says—I am Kwenkwana Ndizile. I have come from Pondoland and I am looking for an uncle who makes bicycles. His name is Paul Ndizile.'

'A strange chance.'

'Your mother says that he has only recently dropped his blanket. He is a raw one, Paul, with no schooling.'

'I wonder if he has a Pass.'

There was a whistle outside and much shouting and then the couplings clashed and the train jerked forward so that Paul was thrown against another man. He smiled and he held to the pole that supported the seat on which his father sat.

'A new driver,' the stranger said.

'Must be.'

The train gathered speed and the seated people bounced in rhythm.

'I left without a Pass,' Old Paul said, and Paul bent down to hear better.

'I said, I left without a Pass.'

'He's okay as long as he's got a ticket,' the stranger said, and Paul nodded.

The train stopped soon enough at New Canada Junction and there were more people waiting to get on. The standing travellers were packed tighter and Paul clung to his pole.

'Have you ever thought about going back? To Pondoland?' Paul asked.

'Go back?'

Long ago Old Paul had thought about it. He had suggested to Mary that they go and live in Pondoland, near the sea, but Mary had only laughed.

'Our land is near the sea,' he said. 'Our field is on the top of a hill and from it you can see the blue ocean below. The waves break against the rocks and it is strange to see a seagull settle on a mealie stalk. But that is how it is. It is a beautiful place and at night you can watch the moon rise over the sea.'

'I would like to see it.'

'Maybe one day. Maybe we can all go down there and see the place again. But the soil. That is what is wrong. The soil has worked too hard these many years and in some places it turns to

sand and nothing will grow. The rain drains rapidly away and there is no strength in the earth.'

Mary had made Kwenkwana wash his khaki shorts and his shirt and now he stood, neat at the gateway. It was a firm iron gate and a low hedge lined the front of the small plot. The hedge was clipped and cared for, spruce like the house itself. A small patch of lawn grew near the gate. In the middle of the lawn was a tiny pond and in the pond was a rock with a tin set in cement on top of the rock. Kwenkwana had noticed earlier that the tin was full of water and he wondered what its purpose could be. On the edge of the tin sat a toy bird, fixed by its wire legs to the rim.

'They will come up that way,' Mary told him pointing to the left. 'The old man will be in a blue suit. You must meet them first, for you are all Ndiziles.'

Kwenkwana waited there and he did not know that Mary was watching from the window as the two Pauls approached.

'I am Kwenkwana,' he said as the two men came up to the house.

'Ah, Kwenkwana! You have come a long way! And I am your uncle Paul whom you searched for. And your cousin Paul who has come home from school.'

Kwenkwana held out his hand and they touched fingers lightly, as is the way in Pondoland. Kwenkwana's feet were bare but the shorts and the coarse shirt did not betray him and to Old Paul, and Paul too, he looked like any young boy in the township. He was cleaner than most and more ready to smile. He smiled now and he looked at his city relatives in their fine clothes.

'I was to wait for you then bring you both in.'

'It was good of you to welcome us,' Old Paul said, 'we have walked from the station and Mary will have tea for us. Tea will be good!'

'Will you come, then?'

Kwenkwana stepped aside, and as they entered the small garden the front door opened and Mary ran out. How could she only watch from the window as men stood awkward and uncomfortable by the gate? She held out her arms as she ran towards them, shouting a high-pitched welcome.

'Aai! But it is good to see you both!'

Old Paul put his arms around her and they turned once, then Mary grabbed her son, holding him close and then thrusting him away to look at him at arm's length.

'My! But look at him!'

Then she hugged him again and held his arm and Kwenkwana stood to one side, smiling at their happiness.

Mary ushered them into her home and she stood the father and son together in the lounge near the window and she looked at them again. She stood back and held her hands together in front of her, fingers pointed upwards, their tips lightly touching her smiling lips. Then she let out another cry and slapped her thighs with open hands.

'Aaai! But it's good to see you. Tea! I've got tea!'

She hurried into the kitchen and Old Paul shook his head and he put his hands on his son's shoulders.

'That's your mother!'

'It is nice to see her so happy.'

'This home is always happy. Look here.'

Old Paul took a picture from the table.

'That is me when I worked at the factory.'

'Yes, I've seen it, father.'

'Kwenkwana, that is me when I worked at the factory.'

Kwenkwana took the picture and he looked at it and said the same thing that had first come into his mind about that picture.

'It does not look like my father. My father looks older. Even older than you look now. But that is not so.'

Paul took the picture from him and Mary came in with a cloth.

'Pick up the others, please, Paul,' she asked, and Kwenkwana and Paul held the other pictures while Mary spread the cloth.

'Now put them back where we can look at them. Wasn't he a man in his day! Kwenkwana says you don't look at all like your brother!'

'My father looks older because it is not an easy life when the land is sick,' Kwenkwana said.

There was silence for a while. Mary smoothed the tea-cloth and then she laughed and raised her hands again bringing them down with a slap on to the table.

'Aai! But you should have seen our Kwenkwana! Standing there by the iron gate of the factory talking to the police boy. You looked so lost and there was another boy with you. What happened to him?'

'I met him on the journey. He has gone to look for work somewhere else. There is none at the bicycle factory.'

'No,' Mary said. 'Those who are there hold on to their jobs tightly, because the pay is good!'

Mary went back into the kitchen and they heard the oven door open. Old Paul knew that she had not meant it, but why had he not held on to his job tightly? Why was he not still one of those who earned the good money?

'Aai!' Mary called from the kitchen. 'Such scones I make for you! Sit down now and talk, you three, there is much to talk about. Tell them, Kwenkwana, how you found me!'

They sat down and Old Paul chuckled and turned to Kwenkwana.

'This is a happy home,' he said. 'You are lucky to have found it. Tell us now, who was it at the factory that remembered me?'

'At the factory?'

'Who was it who told you about me and about Mary?'

Kwenkwana did not understand. He shook his head, thinking of those moments by the gate when he had arrived, yet not arrived.

'I thought I would find you there,' he said.

'You didn't find me but you found Mary. How was that?'

'She was there by the cart and she called me and gave me hot tea and a bun.'

'She called you?'

'I was at the gate and they told me that they did not know you, that there was no work at the factory. Then she called me. You have arrived, she said, then music came from inside her cart and she laughed when I told her that I had come to make bicycles.'

'Mother always laughs,' Paul said.

'She laughed and she gave me the tea and the bun. She said I must get the job of blowing up the tyres!'

Kwenkwana shook his head again, smiling as he remembered the woman's laughter.

'And then she asked me where I had come from and I told her. I told her also that you were working at the factory and when I told her our name she repeated it. "Ndizile?" she said. "Ndizile? Perhaps he has flown away!" But I saw by her eyes that she was not laughing now.'

'And so she took you in?' Old Paul asked.

'She brought me here and she said that she would write a letter to you and that you would come.'

They did not remember me, Old Paul thought. They did not know me at the factory and there is no work there because men hold on to their jobs, tightly. Yet Mary had found him and Mary had brought him home and was that not the thing that really mattered? He leant back in his chair and held out his arms, cheerfully welcoming his brother's son.

'And I have come, Kwenkwana. You have found your uncle, old Paul Ndizile.'

'You are as I thought you would be,' Kwenkwana said, 'only you no longer work at the factory.'

Kwenkwana sat on the very edge of his chair and he studied the two men. Old Paul pulled at the lapels of his suit.

'You like this suit?'

'You are as I thought you would be.'

'I keep telling Paul that he must get a suit, but look at him!'

Kwenkwana looked at him. There seemed to be nothing wrong with Paul's clothes. He knew that one day he too would own a coat with leather at the elbows. He would put leather on the pockets and around the neck as well. It would be shiny leather and he would polish it each day. The shoes were not what he would buy. There was no colour in them and no patterns. He would like them red with white patches and a shiny toe.

'You are indeed men of the city,' he said and both Pauls laughed.

'Well now, my new man of the city, suppose you tell us about home and why you have left it?'

'I left home because I had to find work. The land would not feed us and I had grown old enough to work.'

Of course, Old Paul thought, why should he ask the question? It was the same with the hundreds that left home each month.

'Yes, that is how it was with me too,' he said, 'but tell us, when you decided to come here did you not first arrange a Pass?'

'I came to learn to work in a factory and one does not easily get such a Pass. I had heard them tell at home how the factories were to be moved so that they would be close to our homes. Then we would not have to travel so far to work. We could live at home and go each day to the factory and arrive at the end of the week with money in our pockets. But first, I thought, before these factories are moved I must learn to work in them so that when they come to Pondoland, I will be taught. School does not teach one for a factory, so I thought I would have to go away and learn. A Pass to the gold mines is easy but there will be no mines in Pondoland because they say that there is only gold where the white man is. Our lands do not have gold beneath them, so what was the use of going to learn to work on the mines?'

'You were at school?' Old Paul asked.

'There is a school near Zamakulungisa's store, but I did not go to it. At that time there was no room. But Poto goes to school. He has started with a slate.'

'Poto?'

'Poto is my small brother. He helps with the ploughing and the planting but he takes his slate each day and he goes to school when the school is open.'

'So there is another one. Another Ndizile on the land that you have run away from?'

Kwenkwana looked down at the floor and shuffled his bare feet. He picked at a callus on his palm. Then he looked up at Old Paul.

'I cannot go back. I came away and even you know that those that stay behind share a little in the things that will be found by those that leave. How could it be otherwise? I cannot return and tell them that I could not find work when it is known that there are very many of us working in the towns. Why could I not find work? What is wrong with me? I have not a limping leg like my father. What became of my adventure? It would be like that and I could not go back. See how even the letter you wrote told us of the factory and how my father remembered and used to talk to

us in the evening of you, his brother, who made bicycles. You did not go back.'

Old Paul remembered. To return after setting out to find work, would be to admit defeat. He turned to his son, for surely he could understand this too and he could do something to help the young man who was looking for work? He was glad to hear his son talk.

'I see it,' Paul said. He leant forward now on his leather elbows and he pointed a finger at Kwenkwana. 'I see just how it is. You are how old?'

'Seventeen.'

'Seventeen. You are seventeen and strong and you want to work. There is no work at home so you must borrow some money to get to a place where there is work. Where did you borrow it?'

'From Shixini.'

Old Paul remembered the family name. There were many Shixinis. They were a strong family. There were Headmen amongst them. But the name did not seem to interest his son any further.

'You borrowed from Shixini and the first thing that you must do is to find work and send back a letter with the money that you have borrowed, saying that you have arrived and that you are working, and here is the money that you lent me, returned just as I promised you! It is not difficult to return this money for soon I will be rich!'

'That is it,' Kwenkwana whispered.

'Right! Pass laws mean nothing. Why should they? You live in a country where people work and you too want to work. There is only the matter of the distance between you and the work. You have made the first step. The distance is covered. You are here. All you need now is the work.'

'I thought perhaps I could work with uncle Paul . . .'

'But your uncle Paul now works in Johannesburg which is the worst place for Passes. You did not go to school and you cannot read or write.'

Old Paul hoped that his son would not be too hard on the young man. Of course he could not work with a pen as his son could do. He had only his hands. He would have to wield a pick

or a shovel or a broom perhaps. He hoped that his son had not grown to despise these things.

'The factory is full,' Paul continued. 'You are, in the law's eyes, a vagrant. You could be put into jail for ten days then sent to work on a farm.'

The word 'jail' made Kwenkwana start and his mouth dropped open.

'Don't worry, Kwenk! The law does not matter too much. Not while you are in the township, and that is where we must look for a job for you. In the township. In one of the many businesses that are growing in the townships. Businesses that are run by Africans who do not ask too many questions. That's what we'll do. Then you can send the money home and all will be all right for a while!'

Paul laughed and slapped Kwenkwana on the shoulder.

'How does that sound?' he asked.

It was true. About the leaving home and the money and the Passes, and it was probably true about the law, but what sort of work would there be in the township? There were no factories in the township.

'What will I learn there?' Kwenkwana asked. 'Will it be something that I can use another day when there are factories at home?'

'Just for now, Kwenkwana, forget about the factories at home. Forget about them. We'll find you some sort of work. Sweeping, cleaning windows, anything!'

Listening to Kwenkwana talk, and hearing from the young man about those same hopes repeated, was bringing back an old sadness and Old Paul wanted to ask the young man more about his brother. He wanted to hear about the field and the sea and about Shixini and even about Zamakulungisa's store. He wanted to tell him that really, although he was an old man, he understood. He would stand by him, for was he not his brother's son?

'It sounds good,' Old Paul said. 'We will find work for you in one of the businesses in Mofolokohlo.'

Mary came in with the tea-tray. She put it on the table and Old Paul moved to help her.

'Now just you sit down,' Mary said. 'This is my party. Three

men in my house and all of them Ndiziles! What is this about business in Mofolokohlo? Business is good in Mofolokohlo! Who makes more money than I do? Do we all take milk?’

The cups were large and heavy and Mary dashed milk into each.

‘We must all think about a job for Kwenkwana,’ she said as she poured the tea. ‘While we talk about other things we must all think. Don’t you worry, Kwenkwana, you are in good hands. You can stay here until we think of something for you.’

She passed a cup to Paul.

‘And you, my son? What about you now? The school and the exams and all? Come, you have a lot to tell us.’

‘Where shall I start, mother?’

‘At the beginning. Since you left us last. Leave nothing out. You are the one who is going to write. Well then, tell us the story of your last months at school. How does it feel? Just a moment, I’ll get the scones.’

Mary got up and she came back with the hot scones and butter in a dish.

‘Talk now, Paul, while I butter these. We must eat them hot before the butter melts. It’s that taste of cold butter and hot scones that is so good.’

‘They are golden brown, crisp and soft all at once. Your mother knows scones,’ Old Paul said.

Paul told them of the last term. He told them about Old Puff Adder and about the last Sundays in the hut by the river. He talked of Ralitapula and there was an eagerness in his voice and laughter and cheerfulness in his eyes, so that Mary knew that they would hear more of Lereng, the Basuto. Was she not herself a Basuto? Mary Mopeli, the Basuto business woman.

Paul told them too of the exams and of the results and of his hope for the future. When he spoke of the University Old Paul dropped his head and he wrung his hands in his lap and he could not push away the feeling of fear for the future and concern for the blind eagerness of his son who had crossed over the stream.

‘But money,’ Mary said at one stage, ‘where does the money come from? These things surely cost money?’

'It is a prize, mother. The prize is the course at the University.'

'It is some prize! Who else gets it besides yourself and Lereng?'

'No one else this year, mother, but perhaps another year there will be others.'

'Are there any Africans at that University?'

'There are some, mother.'

'How many?'

'About a hundred.'

'Out of how many?'

'I don't know for sure. It's a big place. Maybe four or five thousand.'

'And clothes, and books, all the other things that the prize doesn't include?'

'I spoke to father about those things.'

'Ah! And your father has money for them?'

'He will help.'

Mary too had thought that it would be over once the school was finished and though she had some money saved she knew that young men should not be fed with a spoon for too long.

'I know!' she said suddenly. 'You can write for the papers, for *Bona, Zonk, Tom-tom*. That's where the money will come from!'

'I could try.'

'Of course you could try' Write to them about the University in which there are only a hundred out of five thousand. Tell them how you feel, where you live, what you learn. Tell them what it's like in there. The people will want to know. Paul Ndizile writes from the University! They will pay you for it, Paul.'

'I could try, mother.'

'Of course you'll try. But more, tell us more about this man Lereng.'

Paul told them more about Lereng and he told them of his hopes for the coming year, and they picked up a little of the excitement, and Kwenkana's mouth hung wide open.

It was right to hope and it was right to feel the excitement and while Old Paul thought of huge pillars at the University, of bright lights and of rich men's sons and while he worried that this was not a world for his own son, Paul himself rushed on,

sweeping through the future with a huge confidence. That too might be right, Old Paul knew, but the starting off on a journey was not the journey itself and hope was not the same shape as time. Should his son talk with such brave decision of writing for money and for newspapers, when his cousin who had arrived from Pondoland had only his hands and no schooling in his head?

II

UDONGA-LUDE

6

The bacon sizzled in the pan and Old Paul flipped it over with a fork. The coffee bubbled in its percolator and splashed noisily on to the hot plate. Old Paul moved the percolator to the edge of the stove and he put the bacon on a plate in the warmer. In the bacon fat he fried two eggs, breakfast for Baas Koos, who had to be early at the University on Fridays.

During the first year Baas Koos had not worried too much about time. He would lie in bed until late and sometimes he called for breakfast in his room. Even during the second year he had not been as urgent as he had recently become. Old Paul could not quite understand it, but when he had last seen his son some months ago, he had been told that Baas Koos was doing the same year all over again. Really, though it was the third year at the University, it was only the work of the second year that Baas Koos was doing and Old Paul smiled to himself. He saw little of his son these days, but there was the one comfort of knowing that when Paul went to the University in the morning he went to do the work that needed two years' learning and not only one. And certainly, work that required so many years of school and then two more at a University must be trying for a young man's brains. Baas Koos had obviously found it so.

There was not only the matter of the third year at the University but the name Paul Ndizile meant more to the world now because it appeared in heavy black letters above a story in *Tomtom* or *Zonk*, and sometimes it even appeared in the newspapers.

Now Old Paul could accept that his son would be paid for what he wrote and could accept that this young man had climbed the wall and sat now on top of it. He could not understand it too well but because he had seen it these last few years he could accept it. From the top of that wall his son could no doubt see the strange country rolling huge and exciting around him and perhaps he looked down sometimes at his father in a kitchen.

The wall was high yet it had been climbed. A long time ago there was a stream to be crossed just as there was a wall to be climbed. The wall had been climbed and the stream had been crossed. Paul stood on the other side of the stream with his hand held out and perhaps Baas Koos would grab that hand and be helped to the other bank. Yet was it not his bank? Was that not the side on which Koosie was allowed to stand because of the colour of his skin? Was it not the white man's side?

Willie came into the kitchen. Old Paul put Baas Koos's breakfast on a tray and Willie took it through into the dining-room. Old Paul had some baking to do. Mrs van Staden was having people to tea. He took a mixing-bowl from the shelf and stooped down to open the flour bin. His back ached these days and the flour bin was low. He straightened himself, thinking that these last two years which had been a time of such growth for his son had told on him. As the young grew strong so he—who had really served his purpose—began to fade.

Those first few months, the ones straight after the Mission school, had been so good! In the evening Paul would walk down from Dougal House and they would talk together over tea. The quiet room in the backyard of Mr van Staden's home had been a refuge for the young man. A place to creep away, a place to find quiet attention from a father, a place to forget about the strain of those first days. In the room Paul talked and Old Paul listened.

At first it had been like being thrown into a fast-flowing river, Paul had said. He talked in Xhosa then, and he talked of a flooded stream near the Mission school, how it swirled him close to the bank as it ran fast down from Intabamhlope. Logs and leafy branches, fallen after the storm, brushed past, and dead wood from last year's flood, loosened from high perches, floated with him. They did this for fun, Paul had said, and there was a

smooth grassy bank where the flood swirled over into the veld. It was at a bend in the river and you had to guide your way to that bank until the softness of the flooded grass could be felt beneath your feet. Then you could stand up and the water would swirl harmless and friendly against your legs.

'It is like that, father. I cannot find the firm bank beneath my feet.' . . .

Willie came with dirty plates to the sink and Old Paul worked on the butter and sugar with a wooden spoon.

'Get me six eggs, then take the coffee to Baas Koos,' Old Paul ordered.

Willie fetched the eggs from the fridge and took the coffee into the dining-room.

Mary had listened when Old Paul repeated the stories that their son had told him, but she had not been too concerned. It was not Paul that she worried about so much, but Kwenkwana. Kwenkwana had left the third job that she had found for him and now he worked for the Basuto in Sweet Meadows. Still he had no Pass, and although Mary had tried hard to teach the young man to read and to write, Kwenkwana had little interest in such things. He preferred always to spend the money that he earned on fun and cheap clothes. He had returned the money to Shixini and then he had sent a few pounds to his father. But now he needed the money too much and he bought a guitar and a pink shirt. Now on Sundays he loped through the crowded streets of Sweet Meadows strumming the guitar, just as he had done in Mofolokohlo. What sort of work had the Basuto found for him and what happened to a young man in Sweet Meadows?

A bell rang in the kitchen and Old Paul looked up at the small box of flags and one of them waved urgently. It was the missus calling from her bedroom. Old Paul washed his hands and went into the house to answer the urgent bell.

He stood in the doorway of the missus's bedroom, his feet feeling the soft carpet that stretched from wall to wall of the big pink room. He wore his white sand shoes and he hoped there was no dirt on the soles.

'It's Paul, missus. You rang.'

'Oh, Paul, did you remember tea this morning?'

'Yes, missus.'

'And you'll make one of your cream cakes?'

'I've started, missus.'

'And some sandwiches. Avocado and egg.'

'There are no avocados, missus.'

'Send Willie to get a few.'

'Yes, missus.'

The woman had grown fatter these last few years and her skin was lined and sallow now. Or perhaps it was only the grease she used on it that gave it the ugly colour. Her face shone with it and her hair was tied in a coloured scarf. The sheet was pulled well up and frills of pink hung about her elbows. She held a magazine and her forearms were flabby and worm-white.

'Has Koosie gone?' she asked.

'He's having his coffee, missus.'

'Good. That's all, Paul.'

Old Paul turned to go but he was called again.

'Oh, Paul! How is Paulie? We don't see him much these days.'

'He is very busy, missus. He hasn't time to come and see us.'

'Is he still writing for the papers?'

'I think he still writes, missus.'

'What's wrong with him, Paul? Did you read that last article?'

'He read it for me. I have not seen him since then.'

'A pity they all go wrong.'

What did one say to a fat white woman in a bed? What did one say when the son was talked about at the same time as cakes and sandwiches? True there was something wrong, and there was some bitterness in Paul, a growing bitterness perhaps, but what did this woman know about it? What did she know about young men that went wrong?

'It is a strange world that he lives in,' Old Paul said. 'He is trying to understand it, and his young brain is full of bubbles.'

'Bubbles, Paul? You're a sweet old man sometimes!'

No! Bubbles was not the word! It was not the word for the restlessness of a thing that boils. It was not the word for the churning that starts in a huge pot when a fire is lit beneath it. It was not the word for the power of a young man's brains!

'Not bubbles, missus. There are more than bubbles.'

'Well I hope he doesn't boil over again! I hope he doesn't write any more articles like that last one. All right, you can go now. Remember the best cloth for the table.'

'Yes, missus.'

Old Paul returned to the kitchen thinking of pink carpets and fat arms and of a high voice that laughed at him.

Baas Koos had finished breakfast and he hurried through the kitchen carrying his books.

'Thanks, Paul,' he said, then he was gone, fed and in a hurry, with books under his arm.

Old Paul watched the back gate swing and then he heard a car start in the garage.

Paul had said something about motor cars. It was something about big cars in a parking place.

Old Paul added an egg and began to beat the cake mix. The thick sugary mass stuck heavily to the spoon. He heard the car roar and then it reversed out of the garage. Baas Koos turned and hurried out of the gate and the tyres squealed on the tar as he swung into the main road. His books would be on the seat beside him and he would arrive in time for the early lecture.

Old Paul scraped the wooden spoon with a kitchen knife and he stared after the car, wondering again about the Basuto and about Paul and Kwenkwana and about the University which was really a place for rich men's sons.

What was a cook-boy's son doing there? If a man crashed so often against the wall surely he would be bruised! Paul charged around in there like a young bull in a strange kraal, and the others turned their horns on him, and one day he would limp home with a huge gash in his side; his heart might be torn out for all to see. It would be a darker, sadder day and what colour would that heart be?

The back gate swung again and Hamilton walked across the yard carrying a roll of plastic hosepipe. He smoked his brown-paper cigarette, the glowing ash inside his mouth, the flat tip, stringy with tobacco, sticking out of his lips. Old Paul smiled as Hamilton let a thin wisp of smoke escape from the corner of his mouth. It's cheaper this way, Hamilton had explained. It lasts longer, the hot ash inside the mouth.

And you have to spit all day, Old Paul thought, a long yellow stream squirting from between your teeth!

Hamilton removed the cigarette and spat. The thin stream shot accurately into the sweet peas which clung to a white wall. Hamilton looked up at the window and he grinned at Old Paul, replaced his cigarette, ash inwards, hitched the roll of hose on to his shoulder and went off to the garden.

With waiters and garden boys Old Paul had to live! He had to listen to them gossip over their putu and stew and he had to hear about their women and see the yellow gobs of tobacco juice drip from green leaves!

Old Paul broke the remaining eggs into the mixing-bowl, rapidly, one after the other, knowing that he should not do it this way. It was easier to stir now. Mrs van Staden had to have a light cake and dainty sandwiches and a plate with a doily. . . .

It had been so good during those first few months. When he and Paul could talk and when Paul would read some of the things he had written for the man who taught him English. So good, why did it have to stop? Why did the young man have to boil over so that the bitterness splashed noisily into the fire?

The first stories in the magazines had been eager, exciting ones and there had been much to laugh about and to enjoy. Mary's idea of money for writing had been a good one, and the money that Paul earned had made it easier for them all. It was good when a man could be paid for making others happy. Then, as Paul's name became known and as he grew to enjoy the nod of acquaintance from other men, as he began to raise his voice higher, a piercing, uncontrolled note could be heard. Old Paul was afraid of that note. It disturbed his soul. . . .

'What do you think this was worth, father?'

'Words for money! Yours is a good job.'

'I got five guineas for this.'

'Guineas?'

'Five pounds and five shillings. Ten rand fifty.'

'That is money.'

'Want to read it, father?'

Old Paul had taken the piece of paper that his son offered and way down in the pit of his stomach he had felt that old

uneasiness. The old fear, the old suspicion jabbed at him, deep down, for the paper that his son held out was a sheet of newspaper, unfriendly, and packed with print.

'What is this, my son?'

'It's a page from last night's paper.'

Old Paul had read the sentences slowly. The large letters at the top of the page proclaimed to the world that Paul Ndizile was a third-year student at the University of the Witwatersrand.

'What is this? I don't understand.'

'That's just to say who wrote the article. People like to know these things.'

'So you wrote it?'

'Yes, father. And I was paid.'

'Will you read what you have written?'

'If you want me to.'

'I want you to, my son. Tell me what you have written for the world to hear.'

'Not the world, father.'

'The newspaper is read by many people. Read what it says.'

'It is not very good, father. It was an essay I wrote, the lecturer sent it in.'

'The teacher?'

'Yes, the teacher. He set us the subject, you see, father, and this is what I wrote. He sent it to the paper.'

'I see,' Old Paul said, not seeing at all, and his son read from the newspaper.

'The writer of this article, Mr Paul Ndizile, is a third-year student at the University of the Witwatersrand. He comments on the Separate Universities Act:

This is a University. A man must find himself in a place like this. He must sniff around like a dog in a backyard and find something for himself. No matter if he is a black dog. He has jumped the wall and is in the yard! You could not know what it has meant to scale the wall, you could not know how a dog will fight to stay in a yard where the pickings are good. But I do.

I can't ride in that bus, I can't walk in that doorway, I can't sit on that bench, I can't drink coffee in that crowded café, can't go

to town without a Pass, I can't vote. But I can sniff around, I can smell the strange excitement of this particular yard, and because my eyes are open I can see. No one can take that from me. I can see and breathe and live in this exciting place.

I can see the eagerness of some to hold out a hand and I can feel their fear of doing so. I can see the hope in a Professor's eyes, I can see that crystal glint! I can see the faith! I can see the falsehood too, the deceit, the hypocrisy, the arrogance of a privileged man bending low to touch a black skin. I can see the crapulence of your wealth, the Packard in the students' parking lot. I can see the inconsequential stuff, the mediocre mummy's boy in blue corduroys, smoking King Size filters. After the back-slap and the light laugh comes a brushing of the hand in disgust and a muttered curse.

I see, I learn, I pick from the richness of this yard, and I become strong. Perhaps that is why you will weed me out. Perhaps that is why I'm to be identified by my coat, my own coat, like a brindle dog, or Spotty, the terrier. I'm to be picked up and deposited elsewhere, away from this pedigree yard. I'm to be dropped, forgotten, in a lapha where I can develop along my own sweet lines. I'm to be given my own University!

Please, Teacher? What does this mean in the world of today?

You accept my people as servants. You smile at the piccanin by the side of the road, you think the huts in Pondoland are picturesque, the hovels of Pimville such a terrible contrast. You like the red-blanketed African, the fellow who knows his place, but you have a deep fear of me, his brother. Am I forcing my way into the lovely soft world that you have built up for yourselves? Must you rationalize this fear by saying that I will go Communist if I am allowed to continue my studies in an open University? Oh him! He's gone Communist! Not gone Native, gone Communist!

Universe, Universitas, University. How can we rob one another of the mutual stimulation of working together? How can you tell a University what it should teach and how its students should think? How can anyone be so blind as to rob our country of its greatness?

Together we could be great. Together we could lead this crazy

bubbling continent. We have had a fair start, gained legitimately in fifty years of toil and we could maintain that lead, your people and my people. We could increase our lead so that the world would look upon a proud nation, mixed as we irrevocably are, mixed and South African and strong. And then who would try to recover the sand and the stone and the cement from a block of concrete?

But it is not to be. You will separate us. I shall grow on my lines and you on yours. We shall grow apart, apart and hating. It will not work, and I am on the side of history. My great-grandchildren will read this history and there will only be a sentence there, dull and documented: "The Government of the day endeavoured, without success, to enforce a racial separation based on ideals of racial and national purity."

To those of us who are living the letters and the words that will make up that inevitable sentence, there is only tragedy in the air. While you bicker over wounds and hates of the past, while you wave flags for the new state and wear blinkers that shut out the world, while you play mud pies on the river bank, the river flows stronger.'

They had been in Old Paul's room as usual and Old Paul had sat quite still on the bed. He had felt the meaning of the words, the mood of it had touched him and he had been disturbed. His son waited for him to say something, he knew, but what could he say that would not bring the young man's voice to a shout again? What could he say when now it must surely be seen that he would never understand? All he knew of it was the spirit and the feel.

'While the river flows stronger,' he had whispered, 'that is the river near the Mission.'

Then he had looked up and the tears that clouded his eyes could not be easily wiped away. Not with a quick sweep of the hand, not there in front of his son.

'Why the bitterness?' he had asked simply. 'Why do you do it, my son?'

'I must say what I think, father. I must shout if I feel like shouting.'

There it was, the voice rising to a shout again!

'A shout is often heard less than the quiet voice. Say what you want to say, Paul, but say it with good manners.'

'Manners! If you could see some of the things that happen up there. If you could see *their* manners!'

It rose so high and uncontrolled and frightening!

'Even a white man can lack manners, my son. That is no reason why you should be the same.'

'I crawl to lectures, father! I stand outside at break and talk dutifully to black men. Koos van Staden nods occasionally, but it is dangerous to know me. I smile and bow and apologize because I am one amongst so many and why should that be? I don't shout when they are rude. I don't snarl back like a dog snapped at! I take it, father. Absorb it all without a word. But when I write, father, let me write what I want! When the juice comes must I stop it? For Christ's sake can't a man shout if he wants!'

Yes, a man could shout, a young man could shout and people would hear him.

'A pity that the papers print these things,' Old Paul said. 'There are people who will watch you now because to them you are an enemy. Perhaps, my son, you are an enemy even to yourself. Remember you are on the other side now, you have climbed the wall, you and the Basuto, and you must live over there, not fighting and cursing—until you are spat out like something ugly in a stew—but soberly, like grown men.' . . .

Old Paul made the sandwiches, thin and crustless, and he baked the cake and the excellence of Mrs van Staden's tea would be commented upon by the women who came to bridge.

7

Ralitapula Lereng, the Basuto, had a part-time job in Sweet Meadows and he had already paid the deposit on a 1936 Ford tourer. He named the car, simply enough, 'Lechiri-chiri'. At night 'Lechiri-chiri' stood outside an old store in Sweet Meadows.

There were rooms at the back of the store. At one time the store-keeper had lived in these rooms, but recently the whole place had been converted by Ralitapula's new friend, Hippo Litsepe, into a social club. People were lonely in Sweet Meadows, Hippo explained, and they would appreciate a place to dance and sing at night. He called the club the 'Lemme-go-slowly' and he asked Ralitapula to take one of the rooms at the back.

'Next holidays, Rali,' Hippo said, 'you can run the joint and I can rest.'

'Sure,' Rali agreed, falling easily into the tsots-ese of his fat friend. 'Sure, Hippo, we'll make a show of the "Lemme-go-slowly".'

'I need your brains here, Rali. You can watch the books and the members' list and the liquor supply.'

'Sure.'

'One thing I've learnt, Rali, about this sweet township. You better learn it too, my boy.'

Hippo drank only beer and he settled into his armchair. He raised his mug, then he let it sit cool and secure on the bulge of his stomach. He sank lower into the chair and he peered over the top of the mug, smiling at his protégé, Ralitapula Lereng.

'I heard all about you long ago, Lereng,' he said. 'I heard about you when you first went to the University. I've got ears all over, Lereng. And your friend Ndizile. I know about him too.'

'Paul is O.K.'

'In time, in time, Rali, he'll be O.K.'

'What's it about this township?'

'Ah yes, this sweet township.'

Hippo took another gulp of beer and returned the mug to its perch.

'They run the show at the moment, Lereng. The white man has the police and the guns and the power and the country is his. O.K. So you must remember this. They've got the power but they've also got the troubles. They've got *us*, Rali. We are their troubles. While we're here, while we're in the township they think that their troubles are quiet. We have nice little houses in nice neat rows and we have electric light and we are all happy together. Isn't that it, Lereng?'

'Go on.'

'As long as we're left on our own in our own places to develop along our own lines—isn't that how it goes?'

'Let's have it, Hippo.'

'We carry Passes and we come from our own places into the white man's area because we must work. We are not really part of this city. Not part of any city because the white men have built the cities. We are needed only to work. As far as living and playing and laughing goes, we're not meant to do that in a city. Isn't that it?'

Hippo held out a hand and took a cigarette from the pack that Ralitapula offered. Ralitapula lit it for him and Hippo grunted once and grinned as he exhaled.

'You see, Lereng, as long as you stick to the township you can't go wrong. It's only when we move that they worry about us. They've got laws—hundreds of them—to stop us. So you mustn't move, you must find a nice quiet place like this and you only move from here to the city if you have to. And you'll have to, Rali. Every day I want to see you hurrying along to your lessons. But me, I'll stay right here. I don't move, I stay put, Rali, in my own area, developing along my own lines! How's that, man?'

Ralitapula took a can of beer from the case under the table and opened it. He raised the can to Hippo and drank.

'I don't think they mean it quite that way,' he said after a while. 'Your own place is meant to be on the land. Somewhere far from the city where you can till the soil and live on mealies!'

'Is that so, Rali? Man, I never would have thought it. A pity I've got no land far from the city. A pity I have only a small business proposition in a township. A pity there are thousands like me, Rali. With a house or a place like this, or just a shack maybe, and no friends and relations outside in these places you talk about. And this is the lesson you must learn. We're here, Lereng, we're here to stay, and for the moment we'll do as they say. We'll develop along our own lines, man! We'll bubble away inside this little township and we'll make money and we'll watch from here until the time comes. And you're going to be part of this, friend!'

'Sounds fun, Hippo, bubbling away!'

'Lechiri-chiri' had no top. The tourer cruised quietly down Sauer Street heading towards the open road to Vereeniging. Ralitapula and Paul sang as they rode, cheerful on a Sunday morning.

Old Paul sat in the back of the tourer, happy to be driven. This was indeed a surprise! The car had rolled up to the back gate, and there was Paul all smiles, with both hands held out as if it were a usual thing.

'Come on, Pa, we're taking you to Mofolokohlo.'

Just like that it had been. Come on, Pa! Old Paul told the missus and she let him off for the day although it was not his weekend. Hamilton was off too and there would only be Willie to help with the lunch.

The breeze fluttered around him and he leant forward and tapped his son's shoulder.

'What is special about today that you come to fetch me?' he asked.

'It's a lovely day, Pa! Look at the sky.'

'There have been other days like this one. Yet you did not come.'

'Relax, Dad,' Ralitapula said

'Has there perhaps been some news about the tests?'

'He means the exams,' Paul explained. 'No, Pa, no results yet,' he said, looking back. 'You don't miss much, do you!'

Old Paul settled back again. Nothing about the tests. Just a day when the sun shone, and a day to come and take him for a Sunday ride to Mofolokohlo. Why not? Why shouldn't they remember an old man, and take him in the car which was so much easier than the train? Old Paul looked about him and he watched the closed shops flash by. Men stood on corners selling Sunday newspapers and on the pavements others stood smoking and talking. Snatches of laughter came to him above the noises of the traffic. He leant forward again.

'How is Kwenkwana?' he asked.

'He's fine! You'd hardly know the fellow,' Ralitapula said.

'Has he a Pass yet?'

'We are looking after him! Don't worry about Kwenkwana.'

Ralitapula pulled well over to the left at the Booyens light and stopped. A car drew up next to him in the outside lane. A

child hung her head out of the car window and sucked at an ice-cream cone. Ralitapula held out his hand to the child.

'Give us a lick,' he said, and the child, bewildered by the black man so close to her, offered the cone.

'I wouldn't rob you,' Ralitapula laughed, politely refusing the cone with a wave of the hand.

The driver's door slammed and a man came around the front of his car, strode angrily up to Ralitapula and put a big hand on his shoulder.

'Just cut it out, will you!'

Another car drew up behind 'Lechiri-chiri'. The light was green now but the driver switched off the engine and got out.

'What's the trouble?' he asked.

'Bloody tsotsis! Fooling around with the kids!'

His hand flicked upwards from Ralitapula's shoulder and he clipped him hard across the ear. Ralitapula rubbed his neck and looked up at the man.

'Hey,' he said, 'take it easy.'

'Come on, Rali,' Paul said. 'The light's green.'

'Ja, get going before we beat the hell out of you.'

It might have ended there, but the man took a right-handed swing at Ralitapula. This time Ralitapula was ready. He caught the clumsy arm and, leaning sideways into Paul, he pulled. The man was caught off balance and his head hit the windscreen upright. Blood appeared above his right eye. The other European opened the left side door and grabbed at Paul. He held him by the lapels and punched him twice. The first blow cut Paul's eye and the second only grazed him as he ducked. Ralitapula was out of the car in a flash and he hit his man low, winding him. Then he brought his knee up into his face. There were screams from the cars and a white woman got out and ran towards the Booy-sens Hotel shouting wildly—'They're killing him! They're killing him!' Ralitapula saw another car arrive and the doors opened even before it stopped. He ran around the other side to help Paul. Paul was on the road now and as his assailant stepped back to kick him Old Paul stood up in the back of the car. He reached out and he clamped his hands on the man's throat. The man stumbled and Old Paul held on, Paul picked himself up and

Ralitapula pushed him back into the car. He vaulted over the front seat and into his driving position. Someone else caught the back of the car just as Ralitapula let in the clutch. Old Paul's hands squeezed at the throat they had clamped to, but when the car moved under him his grip was broken and he fell back into his seat. The light was red again but Ralitapula shot through. A crossing car pulled up sharply. The man who had held to the back of 'Lechiri-chiri' fell sprawling on to the tarmac. 'Lechiri-chiri' responded well and pulled away with a roar.

'Jeez! Let's get the hell out of here,' Ralitapula gasped. 'How's the eye?'

'Christ, Rali, did you have to do that?'

'Shut up. I'll take the road through Crown Mines. Out the other side of the plantation and on to Orlando.'

Ralitapula felt a warm thrill in the pit of his stomach. He looked back over his shoulder. The one car which had pulled up half-way across the intersection had turned left and was following him. He had a good lead and he would lose him in the shambles of Crown Mines private roads. They were Sunday picnickers, they would be on their way down to the Vaal River. He would get out on to the Orlando road then round the back way to Mofolokohlo. They probably had his number.

'We'll have to leave "Lechiri-chiri" in Mofolokohlo,' he said. 'Maybe even sell her. I'll be sorry to part with her.'

He swung on to the plantation road and was thankful that there was no one about on the mine. It was Sunday, after all, and everyone was out in the sunshine.

'Well done, old man,' Ralitapula said, looking back over his shoulder. 'You were great!'

Old Paul slumped in the back of the car, his hands clasped tightly in front of him as if he were praying perhaps.

Mary sat quietly in her chair working with figures in a hard-covered book, as Old Paul told her what had happened.

'Can you work at that book as well as listen?' Old Paul asked, and Mary nodded.

'It is not really work,' she said. 'It is only something to hold while I listen.'

Mary drew small arrows and patterns in her cash book and she filled in the heads of the arrows and gave them long tails.

'What can we do?' Old Paul asked at last. 'What can we do, Mary, about this son of ours and about his friend and about Kwenkwana?'

Mary drew the outline of a car and she filled in the rings below it so that it was a square skeleton of a car on dark wheels.

'You say this Lereng sold the car? On a Sunday?'

'He took it to a yard and there were many other cars in the yard, all old ones, and he talked to the man there. Then we left. He said that I must walk to the station and he gave me ten shillings which I returned to him, for I have a little money.'

'Did he have papers for the car?'

'I do not know about the papers, Mary. He seemed to know the man. Or if he did not know him there was some understanding between them.'

'And the other car, the one that followed you into the plantation? It was not a police car?'

'No. I know a police car. It was only a car full of people out for a picnic on Sunday.'

'And the others at the robot? Would they recognize you?'

'I don't think so. But I would know the one white man. I would know him if I saw him.'

'Let's hope you don't!' Mary said, closing her book. 'There were no police. No one was badly hurt. It was the white man who started it. There is only the car that can be recognized everywhere. You were just three Africans riding in it!'

Mary got up from her chair and she paced around the room, her arms working as she talked.

'The Basuto understands this, so he has dumped the car! Someone else will drive it now and someone else will have to explain where they were on a certain Sunday. So?'

She faced Old Paul, her arms held out, her upturned palms inviting an answer.

'But it has happened, and I was there, and is it not best to be honest about it?' Old Paul said.

'The white man started it. It serves him right! You say they were singing before, and even the Basuto did not mean harm

before the white man spoke. Let us forget it and let us hope that there is no more of it!'

'But if they do find out, Mary, what about Paul and the University and the tests at the end of the year? Also, if this one thing happens while I am there what else happens? What else has happened this year while our son has run wild with this friend of his? Even the missus has said, we don't see much of Paul these days. Even the master wonders.'

'The master?'

'Baas van Staden.'

'Please, Paul! You work for him, that's all. What has it to do with him?'

'He has been a good baas.'

'Baas! Yes baas, no baas!'

'He has paid me, Mary, and you know that the money has helped all these years.'

'It has helped. But it has been only what you have earned. You work and you are paid. Above that there is nothing.'

Was there nothing above that? Was there no more to it when you had worked for so many years with one family. When you had followed the family to Johannesburg, when you had watched the son grow up and when you had cooked food for them all and taken the money each month and lived quietly in a room which they gave you? When you had even left a woman so that you could follow them?

'Is there no more to it when we even decided to live in two places?' Paul said. 'You in Mofolokohlo and myself in Johannesburg so that I could work for them? Is there no more to it when a man will leave his wife to follow them?'

'We did not marry, Paul.'

'We had a home here, and then, after a long time, we had a son and we lived happily together. What more is there for a man and woman? You would not marry! It was you! It meant nothing to you to marry in the way I wanted. You would have nothing of a Pondo marriage. What does lobolo mean to me and to whom would you pay it? you said. Remember, Mary? Remember?'

'I remember. I remember too when you were going with them to Johannesburg. I told you to leave them. You could have found

another job. The money is better in Johannesburg, you said. I will not find such a job here in Vereeniging. Fifteen pounds! Fifteen pounds as if it were a fortune. Where will I find fifteen pounds here in Vereeniging?’

Mary stamped her foot once and she walked hurriedly to the kitchen so that Old Paul would not see her eyes.

‘It’s that Basuto!’ she cursed. ‘Poor Kwenkwana, his defence is still a fighting stick. He should not have left home!’

Old Paul followed her, wondering how this had suddenly become the important thing. Not the fight, nor their own son whose weapons were more than a fighting stick, but that Kwenkwana had left home.

He stood behind her as she filled a kettle from the tap. He put his hands on her shoulders.

‘Mary, long ago I left home. Had I not left home I would not have known you.’

Mary turned the tap off and moved over to the stove and Old Paul followed her.

‘It will always be that way. Young men will always leave home. We cannot change that, we must only think how we can help.’

Mary turned and Old Paul’s arms went around her and she rested her head on his chest and she sighed deeply, tired, wondering when she would be able to let go. When could she stop, when could she let herself sink into peacefulness, just as a woman must sink luxuriously into a warm bath, the day’s or the life’s toil forgotten, the warmth so welcome.

‘Is it so late that we cannot still marry?’ Old Paul said. ‘Is there another kind of marriage that would be better now? Is there a church here and a man in a cloak that will marry us? Is it so late for us, Mary?’

8

The students’ café was crowded. Ralitapula and Paul finished their coffee and paid. They left their corner table and walked

outside. It was warm, and the sky was cloudless. They strolled together up to the Main Block and again they looked at the examination results, pinned on impersonal boards in the foyer.

'Ndizile, every time a coconut,' Ralitapula said. 'The Dean will pin a medal on you, my friend!'

Koos van Staden stood by one of the boards and he was writing in a notebook. When he saw Paul he came over to him.

'Paulie! A first in English III. Congratulations, man!' He took Paul's hand.

'Thank you. . . . Do you know Ralitapula Lereng?'

'I don't think we've met.'

The two nodded to one another but Koos did not offer his hand. He turned again to Paul.

'Everyone's talking about you, Paulie. How does it feel?'

'Maybe I can get that library job now!'

There was a commotion near the board. A student burst out from the crowd and he came towards them. He grabbed Koos by the shoulders and swung him round in a crazy dance.

'Kosie, Kosie,' he said, 'I'm through! Hear me, I'm through!'

Then he swung away, waltzing out of the foyer. He stood on the top steps, his hands held high.

'I'm through,' he shouted to them all.

'That's Piet de Jager,' Koos told them. 'He's through at last.' Then he left them to shake old Piet by the hand.

'I've seen that big fellow before,' Ralitapula said.

'He plays rugby for the Province.'

'He's through!'

'So we see.'

'And your friend Kosie?'

'Plugged maths again.'

'It must be a let down.'

Paul looked up at the clock above the Great Hall entrance and Ralitapula sent him along with a firm hand in the small of his back.

'It's nearly two. Time for your medal!'

'Will you wait for me?' Paul asked.

'Right here, friend. I'll sit on the steps.'

Paul walked away down the corridor to the office of the Dean

of the Faculty of Arts, and Ralitapula sat down on the foyer steps. He watched the people hover around the boards on which the results were pinned.

Lereng, R. Failed Pathology I.

His teeth dug into the skin on the back of his hand and he stared at the floor in front of him. His one foot tapped impatiently and he wondered what Paul's summons to the Dean's office could really mean. The Dean would take Paul's hand just as his father's employer's son had done! Everyone would take his hand. Everyone would open their doors and their hearts for the man who carried on his sleeve three capital A's. A—A—A man, First Class Flying Pondo! B.A.

Ralitapula took a knuckle bone from his pocket and he fingered it, turning it over and over, staring at the well-worn ridges. His hands were framed for a moment against a white background and he looked and saw Jessie Simangu, in starched and spotless nurse's uniform, standing directly in front of him 'Bad luck, Lereng,' she said, as he looked up.

Ralitapula sprang to his feet and he dropped the knuckle bone. It rattled on the floor, like a dice thrown for the vital six. He stooped to pick it up and then he held it between thumb and forefinger and Jessie smiled

'It didn't help you this time.'

'Pathology, of all things!'

'Will they give you a Sup.?'

'They must.'

'Yes, they must. Fourth year is the one that's interesting.'

'Maybe I'll go to Natal.'

'No! They can't do that to you.'

'You never know.'

'They've got to let you finish.'

'You say so and I say so, but who knows, these days? But what are you doing down here anyhow?'

'I came to look at the results. We watch you, you know. We watch men like Ralitapula Lereng and Paul Ndizile. We bask a little in the reflected glory!'

'There's no glory here.'

'Isn't there? Think what it means to a wash-girl carrying

home her heavy bundle. Think what it means to a waitress washing plates, to a nanny changing nappies or to a nurse making beds. Think what it means to a black girl hidden beneath a blanket in a smoky hut.'

'In a smoky hut? What's wrong with you today?'

'How would you know if there was anything wrong with me? You so seldom look at me.'

'Look at you! Jessie Simangu, the beautiful nurse. Everybody looks at you!'

Jessie sat down on the step and folded her skirt beneath her and Ralitapula sat next to her, observing her carefully for the first time. He had seen her often enough. There were many of them who nursed at the General, and this one, Nurse Simangu, assisted sometimes at Casualty. She was a good nurse, he knew, one of the few eager and conscientious ones. She lived in Sweet Meadows not far from the 'Lemme-go-slowly' and some time ago Ralitapula had given her a lift home in 'Lechiri-chiri'. Her father was a strict old man who worked for the Municipality and perhaps it was her distant respectability that had always been a little disturbing. She knew about the 'Lemme-go-slowly', most of the nurses did, and some were to be seen there on weekends. Perhaps if the truth were told, she was glad that he had failed!

'You can gloat now,' he said. 'You can gloat over the man who wasted his time in a shebeen!'

'You have wasted your time. One day you will learn.'

'And you will teach me.'

For the first time he saw the woman, he saw the firm outline of her thighs which even the heavy starched uniform could not hide. Her legs were fine, ebony smooth. She turned away, aware of his gaze.

'There's your friend Ndizile,' she exclaimed. 'What's the matter with him!'

Paul walked slowly towards them. His arms hung loose at his sides and he stared at the floor.

'What's happened to him?' Jessie said, alarmed.

Ralitapula hurried up to Paul and he grabbed his lapels and shook him. Students stared but Paul seemed not to notice.

'What's happened, Paul? What is it, man?'

Paul looked up at his friend and he licked his lips and when he spoke there was no life in his voice.

'I am going to America, Rali, for six months. To an American University.'

'What! America!'

Ralitapula gripped the lapels tighter, pulling Paul closer and Paul raised his hands and put them on his friend's shoulders. The two men stood there, linked by the bridge of their arms.

'America, Rali,' Paul said, still with no expression. 'Towards the end of next year. I can start an Honours course, then I get a travel grant.'

Ralitapula let out a wild shriek and he danced around with Paul, pulling him by the lapels. Then he stopped suddenly and shook his friend again.

'Paul! You flying Pondo, you. America! Let's celebrate, man! Let's tear the place apart.'

Jessie came up to them, and she put out a hand and Paul released himself from Ralitapula's friendly embrace.

'Congratulations, Paul,' she said.

'Thank you, Jessie.'

Ralitapula stepped to Jessie's side and his arm went around her, holding her firmly to his.

'Jessie watches us and knows all about us.'

He kissed her neck and laughed.

'Come to the party, Jessie. Paul's going to America. We'll have a party at the "Lemme-go-slowly".'

Jessie removed Ralitapula's hand from her waist and she scowled at him, acutely aware of the people who were watching them. She turned to Paul.

'I am so happy that you are going to America. I'm sure you will see there something of the freedom we all long for.'

The students gathered there heard the clipped words and someone let out a loud guffaw. Jessie walked away and Ralitapula watched her swing through the glass doors out of the Main Block foyer and step briskly down stone steps.

'Jeez,' he said. 'Did you ever see anything like it!'

Paul lay on a bed in the 'Lemme-go-slowly'. He was light-headed

now, the initial shock had faded. Ralitapula opened another two cans of beer.

'He showed me the papers, each one of them,' Paul said eagerly. 'I had to sign a few things. I can hardly believe it! It can't be me!'

'And the money? Where does the money come from?'

'From America, of course. They want to hear all about the new Africa. They want students to come over and tell them all about it. They want to get to know us, the Dean says.'

'Will they let you go?'

'Of course they will! It's their idea not mine! It's the University's idea. I go as a student ambassador! That's what the Dean said. A student ambassador!'

'You'll need a passport. You are not popular with the Special Branch. Not after those articles.'

'It's all arranged, Rali. They've got it all arranged.'

'Have another beer.'

'It's good, this beer.'

Paul lay there looking up at the stained ceiling. It was good to have Ralitapula near him. It was good to talk it all over with a friend. He remembered the times together at Fort Haven. The secret smoking in the morning and the whispered friendship. Now it was secret beer. Ralitapula could always get the things he wanted. Smokes, beer, women.

'Sorry your friend Jessie couldn't come,' Paul said.

Ralitapula sat in a chair, stretched out, legs crossed, the can of beer in his hand.

'She just walked up to me. Bad luck, she says!'

'A nurse for Lereng! A witch-doctor's wife!'

'Perhaps she's the little girl come out of the mist! The maid from the hills!'

Ralitapula took the knuckle bone out of his pocket and he tossed it into the air and caught it again.

'You still keep that thing?' Paul mumbled.

'Forever, Paul. The ridges are rubbed smooth by my tender fingers!'

'Didn't help you in pathology!'

'You self-satisfied bastard!'

'Well, it didn't, did it?'

Ralitapula put the knuckle bone back and took another sip of beer.

'You should marry a nurse,' Paul said. 'Doctors often marry nurses.'

Paul raised his own can and drank. Ralitapula watched him for a moment, smiling at the first-class Pondo with his sixth beer in his hand. The boy who had made it, who stayed at Dougal House like a good student should and who worked way into the night and who was going to America.

'You have a little rest, Paul,' he said, getting up and collecting empty cans. 'Later we'll have a party out front.'

Paul closed his eyes and the ceiling above him spun crazily like a coloured wheel at a fair. It was not an unpleasant sensation. Just a crazy spinning and a light feeling of freedom. You're meant to throw your dart at the wheel and if it's white it's two to one. Like Rali's dice, if it turns, it's a six. The big throw, Paul, the big throw!

America! The U-nited States! The United States of Africa. How would that be, man? United States of Africa! Idea for an article. . . .

'In the huge area of Africa South of the Sahara there are gathered together a variety of people of all races and all creeds. It is essential for their future survival that they all live together in some kind of harmony. The great rivers, the Congo, the Zambezi, and the Limpopo cut across this country.' Limpopo's not so big but it's a nice word. 'Is it true, Mr Ndizile, that some Africans still file their teeth and eat their young?' Only daughters, Mr Finkelstein, only daughters.

Someone sat down on the divan and Paul opened his eyes and turned his head lazily. A woman sat there, not a woman in a white starched uniform, but a woman with a thin dress and large breasts. She was smiling at him and she undid the buttons of his shirt as he lay there and slipped her hand inside and gently stroked his chest. She leaned forward and Paul could see the smeared powder between her breasts. She had a gay face and she was black, so black.

'You are Mermaid?'

'Yes, Morena.'

'You're new. Rali has told me about you.'

'Yes, Morena.'

'Where is he?'

'He's with the Baas. He told me to come here.'

'You are a heathen black savage.'

'Yes, Morena.'

'You are a stupid wide-eyed shiny black heathen. But you're strong and you laugh and you work here. Right?'

'I work here, Morena.'

'Tell me, Mermaid,' Paul asked in a hoarse whisper, 'do you file your teeth and eat your young?'

Mermaid stayed with Paul until he was asleep and then she went back to the Baas's room. Ralitapula was there and Mermaid stood nervously in the doorway.

'How was it, girl?' Hippo asked.

'He was happy, Morena. He was a little drunk perhaps, but he was happy.'

'Go back to him early in the morning. Morning is the time for remorse.'

'Yes, Morena.'

But Mermaid did not move. She stayed there standing in front of Hippo, twisting a piece of her skirt in her fingers.

'Well, what is it?' Hippo asked, leaning back in his chair.

'I was wondering, Morena, if I couldn't perhaps go out front tonight, Morena.'

All the fun was out front. There the girls danced and music and laughter were good on a Saturday night. What was a shebeen without music and laughter?

'Let her go, Hippo,' Ralitapula said, and Hippo waved a hand, dismissing her.

Mermaid slipped away like an excited child. She let out a delighted yelp and Ralitapula watched her bounce out to the party.

Ralitapula heard the noises of the shebeen rush through to him when she opened the door at the end of the passage. Then they were subdued again and he smiled. Hippo did not often let

Mermaid out front. Many of his clients did not care for the gawking presence of such a girl while they enjoyed themselves in the modern way. Perhaps she reminded them too much of their mothers, and there were times when it was best not to be reminded. They were men who laughed and sang and drank and paid. They wore leather jackets and they smoked cheroots and their bright shoes were pointed. The girls they wanted were Golden, Cherish and Sue-Sue. Especially Golden. Her dresses were tight, her lips red and she smoked through a golden holder. Her laughter would rise high above the chatter and the others would envy the man on whose shoulder her arm rested. Sometimes she sang; Ralitapula had rigged a mike in the shebeen and if it was a good party the boys would get together and in no time at all there was a band and Golden would sing.

Hippo picked up his newspaper and he opened it, sweeping his arms wide. He ran his hand down the seam and with a grunt he began to read about a strike in Durban.

'She's too black, that one,' Hippo complained. 'Where did you find her?'

'She's a Basuto who was lost in the city, Hippo.'

'Coolies in Durban worry me. Whose side do you think they're on?'

Ralitapula filled Hippo's beer mug and, seeing that an answer from him was not required, he quietly left him alone.

He looked into his own room, saw that Paul was still asleep, then walked down the passage to the door through which Mermaid had disappeared so eagerly. On the other side of the door a section of the passage had been set aside as a storeroom. Ralitapula looked up at the boxes piled on either side; cases of brandy from the Cape, cases of gin marked 'Agricultural Produce'. He swept aside the heavy curtain at the end of the passage and looked into the 'Lemme-go-slowly'. The bar counter had once been the legitimate counter of the store. The shop floor and the lights, the tables and the chairs, the low wooden stand for the band, the decorations around the walls—posters from European cities acquired by Ralitapula from a travel agent in Hillbrow—and above all, the cheerful noise and the merriment, made up the 'Lemme-go-slowly'.

Kwenkwana was behind the bar washing glasses. He wore his pink shirt with a piece of cord at the neck. His new shoes beat in time to the music and occasionally he flicked his cloth and did a little dance. Clayton was also behind the bar. A good boy, Clayton. He'd been a wages clerk on a gold mine. Ralitapula saw that tonight's band would be a noisy one. There was Humphrey on sax and Fetch-me had brought his guitar. The piano seat stood unoccupied as yet. Hippo would have to get another piano from somewhere. The boys didn't like this one. 'It's full of tins,' they said, 'and she's flat as a cow turd.' Even so, it would not be long before someone took her over. She would spoil the smoothness of Humphrey and Fetch-me. He stepped into the bar and Clayton saw him.

'Rali! Humphrey's here!'

'I've seen him. How's takings?'

'Just fine. Just fine. The place is jam-pack.'

Golden was sitting on a stool at the bar, her arm around a man who was drinking gin. She turned when she heard Ralitapula's voice.

'Rali, you old potato! Tonight will be fun! You know Shakes Masindile, from *Tom-tom*.'

'I'd like to write up a little story about this place,' Shakes said as he leant forward and took Ralitapula's hand

'Nice to see you here again, Shakes, but we don't need a press.'

'Just a little story. No names, man. I've even brought Chocolate along. Hey, Chocolate!'

Further down the bar a short, stocky man drew away from an eager conversation, laughing as he left.

'Man, but this is fine. Just fine,' he said as he came up to them.

'Choc, I want you to meet the boss of the place—Rali meet Chocolate Dhlamini, the best photographer on *Tom-tom*. We'll make a feature even!'

'Thanks, boys,' Ralitapula said, 'but not just now. Hippo's got enough troubles.'

Kwenkwana stopped drying glasses when he saw Ralitapula. He put his cloth down and came up to him, excited.

'Mermaid walked through!' he whispered.

'It's O.K., Kwenk. Watch those glasses. They cost us money.'

‘Sure.’

Kwenkwana laughed and whisked up his cloth again. Ralitapula leant forward on the bar to talk to Golden and to the two gentlemen from *Tom-tom*. He reached under the counter, pulled out a beer and opened it. The beer hissed and bubbled as he pierced the can. Kwenkwana quickly handed him a clean glass.

‘Well, Golden, as you say, tonight’s a party. Have one on the house.’

Kwenkwana carefully dried his glasses and he heard the Basuto laugh and he heard the other people laugh too, and truly this was a man to follow! A man who shook hands with all of them and who walked in and out of the bar like Mr Litsepe himself. A man who did not worry about Passes and who was one day going to be a doctor. A doctor! In white coat with a knife and one of those machines around his neck! Hau! But this was a man.

There was a loud cry from the bar and the man with the big hands, the one called Shakes, banged his fist down on the bar.

‘America!’ he shouted. ‘Do you mean it, man! Hear that, Golden, a scholarship for America.’

Kwenkwana came closer and his mouth hung open as he listened, not understanding who it was who was going to America but knowing that one day he would talk like these people and he would laugh and drink like the Basuto.

‘It’s true, Shakes,’ Ralitapula said. ‘A travel grant. He heard today.’

‘Where’s the man? Get him, get him!’

Someone had just occupied the piano seat and despite a scowl from Humphrey he was getting the feel of her, tins and all. Ralitapula left the bar and paced over to the bandstand. He tapped Humphrey on the shoulder and raised his hand. Humphrey stopped playing and Fetch-me strummed a final beat. Only the tin piano played on, warming up nicely now. Then it too stopped and after a while there was comparative silence in the ‘Lemme-go-slowly’.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ Ralitapula announced, holding his arms out to them. ‘We have here with us tonight Humphrey and Fetch-me and a new friend at the piano.’

The man at the piano stood up and the stool fell. He bowed and then he picked up the stool, grinning to the crowd.

'They will give us music and we will dance and sing. For we have a reason to dance and sing. We dance and sing for a great friend of mine, Mr Paul Ndizile!'

There was clapping from the floor and a shout from Golden and Shakes and Chocolate.

'Paul Ndizile, scholar, journalist, my dear friend, is going to America!'

This time there was clapping from the bar but from the floor came a hum of disbelief, an eager growing sound, and heads turned to one another. Even a drunk looked up. What was this? America? How does one get to America? Satchmo, how do you make that place?

'Paul Ndizile has been awarded a scholarship to an American University,' Ralitapula continued. 'He is going to America. Land where men are free, and our hearts will go with him! Drinks are on the house!' he shouted, and he threw his knuckle bone in the air and caught it, then felt the smooth familiarity and could sense a warning in the tingle of his fingers.

As he crossed the floor he was caught up in the rush. Many came to the 'Lemme-go-slowly' for the cheer and friendship but not all could afford to have more than one or two drinks. Men were patting him on the back and women kissed him. He bumped into Mermaid and she grabbed him and giggled.

'Run and fetch Paul,' he ordered.

'He's asleep, Morena. I must leave him till morning.'

'Go and fetch him,' Ralitapula repeated. He moved his arm as much as he could in the crush and slapped her buttocks.

Clayton, the wages clerk from a gold mine, could hardly believe his ears.

'It'll cost Hippo a fortune,' he hissed as Ralitapula joined him.

'Serve,' he ordered. 'Brandy from the gallon jars. Kwenkwana, give us a jug!'

Clayton twisted the top off a jar and poured the brandy into a jug.

'Line them up,' Ralitapula ordered, and Kwenkwana hurriedly brought out his well-washed glasses. The crowd clamoured

excitedly in front of the bar and Golden drew on her cigarette and puffed smoke into Shakes's face.

'This is going to be quite a ball, darling,' she said.

Mermaid could hardly wait to get back to the party. She hurried along the passage to Rali's room, switched on the light and shook Paul. Paul rolled over on to his side and Mermaid fetched his clothes from the chair.

'Morena, get dressed, quickly. There's a party.'

But Paul was not with her. For a moment he lay there blinking and then he felt a strange deep warmth way down in the pit of his stomach. As if he had come floating awake from a blissful dream, yet could not catch the meaning of the dream. He remembered, suddenly, that the dream would never be caught. Mermaid came up to him, shaking his trousers at him.

'Get them on, Morena. There's a party.'

He looked at her as she leant forward, large breasts bursting from her thin frock, her mouth open in excited chatter.

'They're having a party for you and Baas Lereng says you must come.'

He stared at her breasts, remembering how warm she had been and suddenly he laughed. He rose from the bed and caught hold of her, squeezing her to him

'You're the heathen bitch, Mermaid!'

'Ai! No, please, Morena. I want to go back to the party.'

'You're warm and you're strong and you laugh. That's what Rali says.'

'I laugh, Morena, truly I laugh and I sing and dance. But please, let's go back to the party.'

Paul allowed her to help him into his clothes. He leant on her as she did up his shoes, and the lightness he felt was a new joy.

'Why is the party for me?' he asked.

'Because you're going to America,' Mermaid explained, doing up the other shoe.

'Oh yes, because I'm going to America. Is Rali there?'

'Of course he's there. He's giving drinks to everyone. Everyone, Morena! Just think of it. Now there's a man for you!'

'Yes, there's a man for me. Take me to him, you beautiful heathen bitch.'

As Mermaid parted the curtains that led to the bar, Paul caught Ralitapula's eye. Ralitapula hurried over, grabbed his hand and pulled him in.

'All right, Mermaid, you can go out front.'

Mermaid hurried eagerly away, ducking under the bar flap.

'Paul,' Ralitapula said, handing him a glass of brandy, 'here's to you and to America!'

He held his own glass high and Paul, still with a smile on his face, drank the brandy. He shivered as it went down, and then he could hear someone shouting his name.

'Hey, Ndizile! Come here, you goddam Yank! Here, here!'

It was Shakes, and Ralitapula brought him over and for a while the free service at the bar was interrupted. Ralitapula turned to Kwenkwana.

'Kwenk, you serve. See how much a tot is? Careful with the jug.'

'Sure,' Kwenkwana said, but he saw only Paul, his cousin, and it all came to him now in a rush. It was Paul who was going to America. Paul, his cousin, the one who made money by writing!

'Snap out of it,' Ralitapula said and quickly Kwenkwana took the jug and set about pouring liberal tots into glasses held out to him.

He was worried about the glasses now. They were all out. Every one of them, and still people came asking for clean ones. How could he clean them when they held on to them dirty? There were no more glasses. There wasn't even one sitting on the bar. Not a one. How could he give them clean glasses? Always the Baas had said—Clean glasses, Kwenk. Remember this is a smart place. No tin mugs here. And at night that was his job. To see that there were clean glasses. But tonight! What could a man do? Tonight there was a party for Paul who was going to America and tonight people leant over the bar counter and took glasses for themselves. There was a flash of light and Kwenkwana held up his hand to shield his eyes. But Paul only laughed and the short fat man held a big camera. There was too much on tonight and Kwenkwana gave up and put away his dish cloth.

His condensed milk tin which he kept beneath the bar and into which he poured the dregs of unwashed glasses, was empty.

There was only a thin film covering the bottom. He looked at it dejectedly and then he heard Ralitapula call him.

'Kwenk, bring your tin,' Ralitapula ordered.

Kwenkwana brought it, holding it in both hands and Ralitapula filled it with brandy.

'Now drink it! To the other Ndizile. To your cousin Paul!'

Kwenkwana looked at them each in turn and then he lifted the tin.

'Ndizile!' Kwenkwana cried.

He put the tin to his lips and drank. He was drinking to Paul and to himself and he did not stop until the tin was empty. Then he smacked his lips and wiped his mouth with his hand. His eyes were watering and he breathed in loudly through clenched teeth, to cool his throat. The others laughed and Paul raised his own glass in acknowledgment.

A piccanin made his way through the people on the dance floor and at last reached the bar counter. The small head bobbed up and down between the customers at the bar until Shakes caught it and held it in his huge hand.

'Hey! You over eighteen?'

'Morena, Morena, Morena!' the piccanin said and Ralitapula recognized the small voice.

'Joe! It's you.'

Still held by Shakes, Joe quickly told his story. A police car had stopped not far away and then it had moved off again. The policeman had spoken on the machine. Joe held one cupped hand up to his mouth, talking into a microphone.

'Joe, we'll get you a job on *Tom-tom* one day!' Shakes said, and he patted the boy who ran off into the crowd.

'Police, Shakes, we must get Paul out of here!'

'You think they'll raid?'

'Hippo's luck can't hold for ever.'

'There may be a story yet! Here, take my car, drop him somewhere safe.'

Shakes fumbled in his pocket then produced a key ring.

'It's a great big bath on wheels,' he said. 'There's a tin of petrol on the floor at the back, the gauge doesn't work.'

'A car now, Shakes! Things are looking up.'

'I bought her for a song in Mofolokohlo. Now hurry away with Paul.'

As soon as Ralitapula took the key he recognized it, a worn and friendly key on a familiar ring.

'Where's the car?'

'Out front, Rali, you can't miss it,' Shakes said, then he turned his attention to Golden once again.

Ralitapula led Paul away out through the door at the back of the bar and down the passage. He went into Hippo's room where Hippo was asleep in his chair.

'Police, Hippo!' Ralitapula shouted. 'You better clear the place. I'm getting Paul out of here.'

Hippo caught the one word and he struggled to his feet and waddled out front.

Ralitapula hurried ahead with Paul and Paul stumbled obediently after him through the backyard and out into the alley. They stopped in the shadows of the alley as a police van cruised along the main road. The headlights of the van were covered by wire mesh and the uneven beams swept swiftly past. A siren screamed and Paul caught Ralitapula's arm.

'What about Kwenkwana?' he said urgently. 'You must get him out of there!'

'I'll try, but you go, man. Move! I must get back.'

'And the car? What about the car?'

'It's "Lechiri-chiri", Paul. You'll have to walk. Now move, for Christ's sake!'

Paul was left standing in the alley and Ralitapula hurried back to the 'Lemme-go-slowly'. The darkness of the alley had been complete but now Paul saw that lights were coming on in the surrounding houses. People began to step out into the night. Men wrapped in blankets or heavy greatcoats came out of the houses, woken by the sirens, and they gathered together in small groups. There were shouts from the front of the club and when a bright light was switched on the men moved forward to see what was happening.

'Don't go, honey,' a woman shouted and Paul saw another door open and the woman stood there in a dressing-gown while her husband walked away carrying a stick.

Paul stepped out of the shadows and walked along the alley to join the growing number of curious men and women who came to see what all the fuss was about.

Hippo was in the bar when Ralitapula got back and he was shouting above the din and an effort to get the people to go. Some of them slipped quietly away but Shakes and Golden and many others remained. Humphrey sat on the low band-stand, cross-legged, his saxophone moaning a low note because Hippo was spoiling his fun. Clayton and Kwenkwana were feverishly collecting glasses and Kwenkwana was concerned to see how many had been broken. He heard the siren whine outside and he knew that the party for Paul Ndizile, who was going to America, was over.

9

'Lechiri-chiri' had been spotted on her way to Sweet Meadows and a squad car had followed her until she was parked outside her old home. Two men had got out of the crate and they had gone straight into the kaffir store. Kaffir store? Well, it looked like a kaffir store but yis! what went on inside! Could Headquarters please send a raiding party from Roodepoort.

The people of Sweet Meadows arrived in great numbers to watch the excitement. They collected together in the road and they stood around, inquisitive and unco-operative, as the police went about their task. A shout went up when the customers were brought out of the 'Lemme-go-slowly'.

First there was Shakes Masindile and Humphrey and then Golden and Mermaid handcuffed together. Shakes and Humphrey were laughing but Mermaid struggled and screamed and Golden tried to quieten her. The crowd's voice rose and shrill cries came from the women as Mermaid and Golden were led to the vans.

Others came out then, and as the van doors were locked, the

crowd, now nerved by their numbers, began to chant. The chant grew and the spirit of it spread. The prisoners in the van heard it and they began to thump in unison against the metal of their cage. The van rocked as they beat on its thin shell and then a song came from within the van and above it all could be heard the high sweet voice of Golden.

A loudspeaker boomed out and a small searchlight switched on and its eerie beam swung across the mass of black faces. It picked out a scuffle amongst the crowd and the police ran to where it pointed.

A second great shout went up from the crowd when they spotted Ralitapula and Kwenkwana and Hippo being led from the backyard of the 'Lemme-go-slowly'. Ralitapula raised his handcuffed arm and with it Kwenkwana's and the two of them stood there, saluting the crowd with their shackles. The people waved their arms, returning the salute, and many of them surged forward, and suddenly they were aware of the power of their numbers. Led by the excited shout of one man they rushed forward in a wild scramble. They overwhelmed the policeman and his captives, bundling them all on to the road.

As the weight of bodies tumbled the policeman over he drew his revolver. Ralitapula and Kwenkwana fell together and Kwenkwana cried out as his arm was twisted behind him. Ralitapula rolled over towards him and he saw someone wrench the revolver from the policeman's hand and someone else rip a key from his belt. Then all was confusion. A man grabbed his free arm and as he rolled over and on the ground he came face to face with Paul Ndizile.

'Quick, now is your chance,' Paul said and he slipped the key into the handcuff. It clicked open and Ralitapula and Kwenkwana were free.

'Stay down and crawl,' Paul ordered.

Then the searchlight caught the struggling bodies and for a moment it flashed over them. Men were holding the one policeman down and a knife flashed in the sudden light. Ralitapula and Paul stayed down, hugging the road, but Kwenkwana was kneeling there looking at his free wrists. He held them together and he laughed and then he stood up and shouted out loud, a

meaningless excited shout. He raised his one foot and stamped it hard on to the roadway. His shirt had been torn from his back and his muscles rippled, fine and powerful, in the searchlight. He held his arms out in front of him, rigid in an impromptu war dance.

Ralitapula stretched out one hand to grab Kwenkwana's leg and Paul sprang from where he lay. Together they brought Kwenkwana down just as the first shot rang out. The single shot was followed by a full volley and the three men rolled together on the road, part of the growing disorder. There was shouting and cursing about them and the searchlight swept on to other trouble. As the beam swung from them Paul saw Kwenkwana's face close, upturned towards the sky and he screamed once.

The light had moved from them and Paul stood up and his scream was heard, hoarse and terrifying, mingling with the dying ring of the sudden rifle fire. People about him stumbled over Kwenkwana's body, Ralitapula groaned but rose quickly to his feet to flee and Paul grabbed him and dragged him away.

'Kwenkwana! They've got Kwenkwana!' he shouted.

Then they were bundled along by the retreating crowd, as men and women, silent, now fled from the destruction like animals from a bush fire. Paul stumbled after the mob, moving with it, part of it, seeing in front of him only the lingering image of Kwenkwana's face in the flash of the searchlight. Ralitapula ran next to him and he was shouting.

'Simangu's! Make for Simangu's!'

Ralitapula's right arm hung useless. With his left arm across his body he held it clamped to his side and he leant forward as he ran. He stumbled once and Paul was behind him to help him to his feet.

'Another street, then left,' Ralitapula said.

Paul helped his friend along and all around them the people hurried back to the safety of their homes. Simangu's was one of them, brick and identical, and Ralitapula led them to it.

They took Ralitapula into Mr Simangu's bedroom and there Jessie cut away the bloody cloth that clung to his arm. The bullet had struck high and there was bone in the wound. Jessie packed

towels under the arm and shoulder. She noticed that he held something in his left hand. She eased the fingers open and took away the small bone. She thought of a bottle of blood hanging clinical and life-giving in a hospital ward. She worked quietly, feeling with careful hands the hard outline of the broken bones.

'We must get you to hospital,' she said, as Ralitapula flinched suddenly.

'No,' he gasped. 'Not hospital.'

'We must, Rali.'

'You fix me! You're a nurse, fix me!'

'It would be better in hospital.'

'Fix me! They'll be looking for me!'

Paul stood useless at the end of the bed and Mr Simangu hurried anxiously from the bedroom to the kitchen, muttering to himself.

'The police! The police!' he repeated. 'They will come to look for him.'

'There are many others lying on the road,' Paul told him. 'First they must pick them up and carry them away. First they must clean up the mess they have made.'

'It was a horrible sound!'

Paul came up to Jessie and lightly he touched her shoulder.

'Fix him if you can, Jessie, and hide him. I must go back. I must go back for there is someone there, still lying on the road.'

Outside the 'Lemme-go-slowly' it was quiet now. Even those in the van had been silenced by the shooting and when Paul approached, the searchlight turned towards him as he walked slowly on to the silent stage, with his arms held out beside him, palms forward, coming in peace.

An army truck had arrived now and the hum of an engine could be heard and a brighter light lit up the place. A line of men with rifles had cordoned off the spot where fifteen bodies lay. The soldiers looked towards the lone black man who walked so steadily, making no effort to escape the eye of the searchlight. He came closer until he stood in the open road so that all could see him by the bright light. The searchlight flicked off and an officer approached him.

'Who are you?' he demanded.

'I have come to see one of those who was killed.'

'Just like that, walking straight into the light?'

'What have I to fear?'

The officer looked into Paul's eyes and Paul did not turn away. There was no hate in his eyes, only the lingering shock.

'True, it is quiet now,' the officer said.

'Can I see which one he is?'

'Yes, come with me and we will look together. We will look also at the white man who lies there.'

'Yes, we will look also at him.'

The two men moved from body to body and as they looked down at the evidence of this huge error there was a strange affinity between them. Tears came to Paul's eyes and the officer put a hand on his shoulder to move him to the next one. Then Paul dropped to his knees beside Kwenkwana and the officer stood above them, the bright light behind him and he could see his own shadow, hazy over the body on the road. He bent his head and prayed for the men who lay there.

Chocolate Dhlamini pulled the scoop of a lifetime. His bulbs flashed, all-seeing in the darkness. He had a shot of Ralitapula Lereng and Kwenkwana Ndizile with their handcuffed arms in the air. He had a tabloid dream of Golden and Mermaid. He had four, taken just after the shooting. When Chocolate pulled the print from the fixer he whistled. Beside him stood the news editor of *Tom-tom*.

'Man! but there's a picture for you.'

The two men stared at it and the editor chuckled.

'Chocolate, you're a goddamned genius,' he said.

The black and white evidence of the tragedy meant only news to the two men, and Chocolate glowed under the praise.

'We'll get out a special,' the editor said, 'and we'll run the lot. Did you get one of Shakes?'

'There you have me, Boss. Shakes will be mad at me. He came out early and I didn't want to start popping too soon.'

'Pity. But let's use Golden. Say she's his girl-friend.'

'Jeez, I'm sorry about Shakes,' Chocolate said. 'But I got one of Ndizile! I took it at the party.'

'Print it!'

'I don't know, Boss. He's still free. They might take him in. He's going to America, Boss.'

'He's news, print it!'

The special *Tom-tom* was on the streets the next morning. It came out with exclusive pictures of the shooting in Sweet Meadows.

IO

Kwenkwana was buried, with others who had died that night, in the huge and spreading South Native Cemetery. Old Paul and Mary and Paul and Jessie Simangu were there at the ceremony and the deep resonant speeches of farewell to the departed, the soaring heart-breaking singing of the mourning crowd, touched them all.

Jessie held Paul's hand tightly and she sobbed all the time, a damp handkerchief held to her mouth and Paul tried to comfort her. She had not known Kwenkwana but there were others there, neighbours known, and she sobbed for the senselessness of it, for the pain and useless death, and she thought of one of them lying sick and hidden in her own room, and she remembered the noise and fury of that night.

Paul could not weep. He heard the singing and he saw the earth thrown in, but he could not weep. The emotion that he felt had not the soul simplicity of grief. There was anger there too, anger and a little guilt. The party that had ended this way had been for him because he was going to America. Was he to blame for the wild excitement and for the death of a young man? What churlish fate made it end this way, mournful by the side of a grave? Would the image of that face ever pass from him, and would the young man rest peacefully in a grave so far from home?

Old Paul said that Kwenkwana's body should be taken back

and buried in the soil of Pondoland. He himself stared at the holes dug in a strange land and he aged that day. He began to think calmly of a hut on a hill from which one could see the sea.

Later, Old Paul asked his son to write a good letter to Mashupa, and Paul put down what he could, and he assured Mashupa that his son had been buried with due ceremony in a grave with a stone at the one end. But what would the old man understand of such a letter? A letter which said 'Your son was shot because he stood up in the beam of a searchlight'.

The police came to Paul's room at Dougal House and they questioned him about Lereng and about the photograph and about the caption beneath it. 'Paul Ndizile, B.A., African writer who is going to America.'

'You know Ralitapula Lereng?'

'Yes, officer.'

'He was a colleague of yours?'

'He was a medical student, officer. We saw a lot of one another.'

'You know that we are looking for him?'

'Yes, officer. I am also looking.'

'We've got that Communist, Litsepe. Lereng worked for him. Your brother too.'

'Kwenkwana? My cousin, officer, and he knew nothing about Communists.'

'He had no papers.'

'No, Kwenkwana had no papers.'

'Where did he come from?'

'From Pondoland. He left without a Pass.'

'And you, Ndizile? You're going to America.'

'I hope to, officer.'

'You have applied for a passport.'

'I was told to do so as soon as possible.'

'You were there at the shebeen at Litsepe's. We could take you in.'

'Haven't you got enough of them? Haven't you done enough? Hasn't there been enough misery?'

'Quiet! We could put you inside and then how would you get to America? Now tell us, where is this man Lereng?'

Paul went to Jessie's home that weekend and he told Ralitapula

of the visit from the police. Ralitapula listened and Jessie saw his hand working all the time on the small bone. He played with that bone endlessly now and Jessie had grown afraid of the man. She had put his arm in plaster but Ralitapula's eyes rested on her whenever she stood near his bed and they did not only undress her, they bored deep as if he would peer into her soul. He held the bone up sometimes, showing it to her and letting her know that it had come from a young girl.

The weeks went by and still Paul's passport did not come. Other students told him of past experiences. Of the Science graduate who received his passport on the last day, five hours before his plane was due to leave from Jan Smuts airport. Of the man who had received a note, four days before his due departure, and the note said simply that a passport had been refused. Nothing could help a black man who wanted a passport, he only had to wait. Letters had been written before from the Principal of the University, from the Dean of the Faculty; letters did not help, and finally of course there was the case of the journalist who had been allowed to leave the country only on condition that he did not return. An 'Exit Permit' he got, permission to leave his homeland and never come back.

Paul waited, expecting the knock on the door that would herald the news of this Pass he longed for, this Pass which would be like one that Kwenkwana once needed, a permit into a new world.

Paul left Dougal House and he walked slowly across Yale road and through the Western gate of the University ground. It was early and a cleaning boy scrubbed the floor at the base of the Main Block pillars. The sun shone on his overalled backside and his bare feet stuck out over the top step.

'Morning, Ndizile!' the boy shouted, raising his soapy brush. 'Got your Pass?'

'Not yet,' Paul replied.

The boy continued with his scrubbing and Paul walked on. He waited at the Jan Smuts lights. Cars were already hurrying into the city. He walked past the brewery and up Ameshoff Street to Medical School.

Up at Medical School another cleaning boy was sweeping the steps with a long broom. He stopped and smiled at Paul.

'She's inside,' he said.

Paul walked up the steps, turned left and along the passage that led to the Anatomy Hall. The place was quiet and ugly busts of Bantu stared down at him from the shelves. Along the passage were office doors and Paul pressed himself to the wall when one of these opened.

It was Jessie. She held a number of files under her arm and she hurried down the passage and through the swing doors into the hall. The doors clashed loudly, oilless and uneven, then settled closed again. Paul followed her and slipped into the hall, closing the doors carefully behind him. Jessie did not hear him and she walked between the tables to a bank of filing cabinets which stood along the far wall. Yet another cleaning boy was polishing the teak legs of a dissecting table. This was the hour of cleaning boys, early and crisp, in which the mess of yesterday was swept hopefully aside. Tomorrow it would be the same, however, today's untidiness would face them, ash and papers on a parquet floor. Endlessly the early cleaners set the stage. This one had a small beard and coloured wooden plugs in his pierced ear lobes. He talked to Jessie as he worked.

'Jessie, you come always so early,' he said.

'Always, Petrus.'

'Is this really work for a nurse?'

'It is part of it, Petrus. It is a way to learn more than a nurse should learn. What about some light?'

Petrus pulled on a cord and a blind rattled up letting in the morning sunshine. The bright beams from the window shone on to the macabre green mounds that lay on the tables. Petrus went to one of the mounds and he removed the waterproof sheet from a cadaver. He looked at the shrivelled formalin-shrunk features of a black man.

'Jessie,' he said, 'this man is so ugly.'

'They all are,' Jessie called from across the hall.

'Why do they cut him so?'

'So that others might learn, Petrus.'

'But what happens to his spirit? He has not been trussed up ready to be born into a new world.'

'There is no other way, Petrus. He must be cut up so that the people may learn. This way the dead serve the living.'

'Hau! It frightens me sometimes. Sometimes when I come very early in the morning I look in at the window and I think I can see through the blinds. I see all the bodies covered up, and I am afraid. The room shouts at me and I wish to sit down and hold my hands over my ears. But I must go in and clean up.'

Paul stepped away from his place by the door.

'I think his soul has found peace, Petrus,' he said. 'He has given his body so that others may learn and is his soul therefore not at peace?'

Jessie spun round when she heard his voice.

'Paul! I'm so glad you've come!'

She left her files on top of a cabinet and hurried up to him. She looked tired, Paul thought, and she gripped his hand firmly as he held it out to her.

'Oh, Paul, I'm so worried!'

'How is he?'

'He's gone, Paul!'

'Gone? Where to?'

'I don't know, Paul. Father says he has gone mad!'

Paul held her to him for a moment and she rested her head on his chest.

'Ralitapula is not mad, Jessie. He is just hunted and alone. When did he go?'

'I looked for you yesterday to tell you.'

'I couldn't come, Jessie. I'm sorry.'

Jessie pushed herself away from him but his hands held her forearms.

'Tell me, Jessie.'

'I took the plaster off the day before yesterday. Yesterday morning he came into my room and he switched on the light and he looked at me and I was afraid of him. I'm going, he said. Tell Paul I wish him luck in America. His eyes were so strange, Paul. His bad arm hung to his side.'

'Did he say anything else?'

'Only, tell Paul I wish him luck. Have you heard, Paul?'

'Not yet. Has Rali got any money?'

'I don't know. I don't think so.'

'Did anyone see him go?'

'He just left, Paul. What could I do?'

'You have looked after him. There was nothing more that you could do.'

Paul put an arm around Jessie's shoulders and together they walked towards the door.

'He has been so strange, so frightening!'

'He is sick, Jessie. We will have to find him.'

'But how, Paul? Where would he go? Will he go to the police? Has he given up at last? Shouldn't we have taken him to the hospital in the beginning?'

'No, Jessie. He won't go to the police.'

Petrus brought Jessie's files from the cabinet and he handed them to her.

'You must not forget these,' he said.

He flicked his feather duster over the leg of the last dissecting table and he spoke to them in Zulu.

'It is not for me to tell you what has happened to Lereng,' he said, 'but many years ago when our young men fought and were wounded they crept away, away from the light so that the darkness might heal them. Just as an animal creeps away. They took with them herbs and cures from the witch-doctor and they hid themselves somewhere in a small cave and there they waited for the power of the medicine to cure them. Lereng will do the same. He will disappear somewhere and then one day he will come out again, strong and healed and you will have to praise the spirit that saved him, and marvel at the strength of the old medicine.'

Petrus turned to the nearest corpse and he pulled the sheet away revealing a shrivelled, eyeless face.

'She knows about these things!' he said. 'From where she sits she knows. The dead watch over the living and the ancestors of a warrior will comfort him in time of battle. So will it be with your friend. They will watch over him.'

He covered the face again, then put a hand on Jessie's arm.

'Ndizile,' he said to Paul, 'you are the one who is to fly, you are

the one with wings, you will sit up there on the wall. Udongalude! The wall is high! You will need someone to sit by you up there. So take her, Ndizile, she is a bright and lovely woman!'

'She is, Petrus.'

'Lead her out of this place of horrors, and take her away. Young people should not stand in the morning light with bodies for company. Find a quiet place. A place where the thick grass is cool and where at sunset pink flamingos rest on their flight from somewhere and the colour of their wings blends warily with the shining line of the clouds. Take her to such a place and love her, young man.'

'Thank you, Petrus,' Jessie said. 'It is beautiful the way you say it.'

'Bayete, my princess, you too are a Zulu.'

Paul carried Jessie's files and they walked silently together down the empty corridors and out into the morning sun. She took his hand and led him to the café across the road. Though it was early the woman served them, not inside but at one of the pavement tables. She brought hot coffee and scones.

Jessie helped herself to sugar and Paul saw that her hands were shaking a little. Her spoon clinked against the cup and she stared at the brown everyday swirl.

'You loved Rali, didn't you?' Paul said.

'Loved him?'

'You used to watch him, up here at Medical School.'

'He belonged up here.'

Did Ralitapula belong up here? Ralitapula the doctor! Moving white-coated through the shadows of the huge hospital buildings! Should his name be on one of those files—Lereng, fourth year? Should his hands pick up a probe and follow the delicate patterns of formalin-hardened arteries in a dead man's arm? Should he be here in this world that Jessie knew, should he be here to love her?

'At school we used to say he'd be a witch-doctor one day,' Paul said.

'Perhaps he believed it! Once he pressed that knuckle bone into my palm. There was some power there, some strange feeling of power.'

'He was joking, Jessie, he always played on suspicion. Anyone's suspicion.'

'Was he joking? He used to say such strange things sometimes. "You are the girl from the mists. You are the maid from the mountains." At first I thought it was good. It takes courage to joke when you are as ill as he was. But it went on. On and on, Paul, and in the end it frightened me so. Father was terrified of him.'

'I'm sorry.'

'He demanded so much. I think he wanted to tear at me as if I was his to play with. He wanted to tear, Paul, like a wild animal, a wounded wild animal.'

Jessie took Paul's hand and she held it tight and the table top was cold under Paul's wrist.

'He was sick, Jessie, maybe sicker than we knew.'

'Explain it to me, Paul, please explain it to me!'

'I can't, Jessie. We must find him. If he is so ill we can't leave him to wander alone. We must find him, that's all.'

Jessie dipped a teaspoon into her coffee again, removing the creamy film. She lifted the cup and held it, warm in both hands, as she sipped.

'No word at all about your passport, Paul?'

'Not a thing.'

'And your father, how is he?'

'He worries.'

'Does he know that you have been seeing Rali?'

'He doesn't know. He blames Rali for it all, even for Kwenkwana's death.'

'Was it all Rali's fault?'

'He tried to help Kwenkwana, he tried to save him, even at the last moment.'

'I shall never forget that night,' Jessie whispered. 'The noise and the fear! Your friend frightened me so!'

'He was hurt, Jessie. And now he is sick, that's why we must find him.'

'But where, Paul, where would he go?'

'We must find him. Hiding perhaps in a small cave, just as Petrus said. We must search for him, Jessie, and find him.'

'Around the perimeter of Mofolokohlo, the pile of stones, there has grown an ugly sore of shanties. Corrugated iron and cardboard, beaten paraffin tins, a few stones and many split poles form the homes of hundreds. Accretions of this type are common to most large towns in Southern Africa. Some are worse than others, but, like the scum that bubbles over from a boiling stew, they stick ugly and rotting around the warmth of the urban cauldron that produces them. In these shanties hide Passless men and homeless women. Children run naked through the mucky puddles that collect after the rain and grown men huddle in damp blankets, afraid of the day.'

Paul put his pencil down and got up from his desk and went to the window. Below him squatted the black round ugliness of the gas works tanks. A large woman's legs, advertising stockings, revolved lazily, the obscene pinnacle of a lofty tower. A coal train pulled away from the gas works and a dove flew into the blue gums near the Show grounds. He looked left towards the old school that had been built on a kopje. It was said that during a general strike many years before, the school had been besieged. Even today small boys found bullets and cartridge cases on the stony ground.

There had been fighting on that brown forbidding hill. Fighting and shooting and killing. What had it been about?

Trolley buses moved along the road that ran past the gas works. Black men cycled to work, cold on the winter morning, their wheels hugging the concrete of the gutter as buses passed them. They would keep going, keep following the same road to work. They would feel colder towards the end of the week, then on each payday would come a new warmth. So many miles had been covered and so many paydays passed.

Paul turned from the window and came back to his desk. He picked up a sheet of paper which lay there with the pages he had

written. He looked again at the crest, small and official, and his eyes ran once again over the message that had come at last. If one waited anxiously for good news was it not the possibility of bad news that made one anxious?

The piece of paper was a Banishment Order. It read like a clause in the Statute Book, formal, official and frighteningly final. The words were impersonal yet they hit low and loathsome, straight to the guts. No America, no passport, only the forced confinement in a remote part of the country. The exile of a dangerous man. Only this letter from the Department of the Interior. Only this pass to oblivion, this ticket to darkness.

The Order had arrived three days ago. He had told Jessie, then he had taken it to his father and when he had explained it to him his father had cried. Quiet, soundless tears and he shook his head and kept repeating—It is the bitterness, it is the bitterness. . . .

Paul watched his father crying and what could he say? I have been sent away, father. I have to go to Pondoland. I have to return to a place that I have never seen.

Old Paul got slowly to his feet after a while, shaking his head in sorrow. He left the room, closing the door behind him. Paul flopped down on the bed and lay there on his back, looking up to the tiles which were clanging in neat lines to the parallel rafters. There was no ceiling and light shone through at the top. Paul could see that the tiles overlapped well and though the light came in, rain would not be allowed to enter. The tiles overlapped and they held one another to the square cross-beams, sitting firmly on one another so that the whole roof remained stable. Not one of them could burst out of its place and leave a gaping hole because then the roof would not be a roof and the rain would gush through. There would be no roof over his father's head.

So, in America it was fast and new and though the air you breathed was polluted by the muck of industry yet could you fill your lungs. You could breathe deeply, fill them with anything. With the toasted smoke of a Lucky or the smell of Harlem. There was movement there, constant movement and a black man could find friends. So, so he had been told. So they had written to him.

We look forward to seeing you. We have seven students coming from Africa. Only you from the South. A Mr Merryweather will meet you at the airport. You are booked on Flight 535. Right? It may be strange at first, but you will enjoy it. We will do our best to see that you do. Flight 535, La Guardia or Idlewild? Plane lands every ninety seconds. Pan-Am. TWA. BOAC. American Airlines Incorporated carries more passengers. . . . Juke box Saturday night. . . . Government by the people for the people. . . .

Paul watched a cockroach run along a beam. It stopped at a spider's nest then continued and disappeared into the space above the wall. He wished his father would return. Even with tea. Tea was hot and sweet with sugar. Mr van Staden's tea and Mr van Staden's sugar. Bugger Mr van Staden! But I'll drink his tea. I'll drink it out of a tin mug because that's what my father drinks out of. I'll drink it and love it. Won't I? Starry-eyed damn-fool educated African gentleman. Mind the bloody river, Paul, mind the torrent, you wall-eyed kaffir boy. Come to our side, Paul, it's warm and black and we're all friends together on this side, Paul. This is the turn in the road, the bend in the river, Paul. Come back, Paul. They won't let you fly, you poor wing-clipped melanin-blessed bastard you.

Then Koos knocked on the door. His voice was urgent outside.

'Paulie! Are you there?'

'Bugger off.'

'Paulie, it's me, Koos.'

'Bugger off, Koos.'

The door opened and Koos came into the servant's room. Paul only stared at him from the bed.

'I came to tell you that I am sorry, Paul.'

'Bugger off, will you,' Paul said.

'Paulie, I think they've made a terrible mistake. These things happen when men are confused. Don't let it change you, Paulie. You have a great future serving your own people. There is something special about you, and in the end you will show them. You'll show them because they will have to see in the end. You are their hope, Paulie. Don't forget it, work for the day when the light will shine through.'

Oh Christ! Another tile gone and at that the sunshine came

crowding out the confusion and now he could see it. The thick curtains had gone this time.

'Bugger off, will you,' Paul hissed quietly. But Koos came nearer and then he sat down on the end of the bed.

'I didn't hear that, Paulie.'

'Mind the bugs in the bed. This is a kaffir's room.'

'Don't let it, Paulie. Don't let it get you that way.'

'I just said mind the bugs. There are bugs in here, bugs and disease and God knows what. We're pretty filthy, my father and I. We slip back in the end. We learnt the modern tricks of cleanliness from you but we slip back in the end. We slip quietly back into the darkness from which we came. Doesn't it go something like that?'

'There have been mistakes, Paulie. Don't you remember the days in Vereeniging when we went out into the veld and shot meerkats together?'

'I was your gun dog.'

'You couldn't handle a gun, Paulie. You never learnt.'

'It was fun. Even being your gun dog.'

'Surely those days mean something?'

'They did mean something. They meant a home and a friend and fun in the veld.'

'How far back can you remember, Koos?'

'What do you mean?'

'How far back into your childhood can you go and pick out a clear memory?'

'Let's think. I got my first bike when I was ten. I can remember that. Christmas morning and the bike leaning against my bed.'

'I remember that bike too. You let me ride it. Any further back, Koos?'

'You fell once from the roof of our house and you cut your leg on a piece of tin. There was blood all over the place and we both cried.'

'That's nearer. What I want was before that even.'

'Before that?'

But the memory was not Koos's. It was Paul's and so Paul told him. Just one little memory, but one that hung there like a body

in the wind, now that the curtains had been parted and the breeze allowed in.

'It was soon after my father came to work for you,' Paul said. 'Your father and mother had people in for drinks and dinner. It was after dinner.'

'I would have been in bed.'

'Yes, perhaps that was it. I was in bed too. But my father came to wake me up. He was excited and his hands shook. He hurriedly helped me dress. He mumbled something about the Baas wanting to see me.'

'After dinner?'

'I followed him through the kitchen and into the lounge. I heard the clamour of people and I was a little afraid. Your mother came to the door and took my hand while my father smiled and watched. I looked at him—remember I was not allowed to go into the lounge—and he nodded saying, go on, go with the missus. So I was led into that room by your mother. I can feel the carpet under my bare feet. She held a glass and a cigarette in the hand that was not holding mine. There was a hush in the room and I looked about me, sleepy and bewildered. Yes, I remember now, I looked for you. I looked for you for help but as you say, you must have been in bed. Your mother's voice was loud and crackling, a stranger's voice and she talked about me to her guests. "He's so sleepy," she said, and then she came up to me and bent down to me as if I were her own little darling and she whispered to me. "Go and shake hands with the guests, Paulie, and say good night." I went around and held out my cold hand and the people shook it. A woman patted my head and said, "Man, maar wat 'n pragtige kleintjie!" What a sweet kid! Your mother paraded me like a prize pet. I was a party piece. The van Stadens had taken pity on the little piccanin. I was a symbol of the bold philanthropism and I was such fun for little Koos.'

Paul sat up and grabbed Koos's arm. He held it tightly and his voice was a whisper.

'Remember a song you used to sing as a kid, Koos? Remember "Baa, baa, black sheep? Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full?" She made me sing it Koos! Like a good little child showing off just

before being sent to bed. The guests clapped politely and your mother ushered me back to the kitchen, her hand pushing more firmly now on the back of my head. My father was in the kitchen and he picked me up and he carried me back to bed and he hummed a tune to me, an ordinary old black song about a tortoise and a beetle, and I cried in his arms and I didn't want him to put me down. But he had to because he had to go back to the kitchen. It hurt me, Koos, but I wasn't sure why at the time. I know now. I was your party piece. I was the kaffir who was growing up the right way, respecting the right people, saying the right things. Your party piece has suddenly developed a new routine. He has become himself at last, Koos, and that is a sin!

Old Paul came in with a pot of tea and with two tin mugs on a tray. He hesitated when he saw Baasie Koos, but then he put the tray down on the small table by his bed. It was an 'inside' tray, not the servants', and he hoped that Baasie Koos would not notice.

Koos stood up and still he held out a hand to Paul and Paul took it, but he did not rise from the bed.

'I'm sorry. That's what I came to say. Sorry that the trip is off.'

'There wasn't much that you could have done, Koos.'

Koos left and Old Paul wanted to ask his son what had happened, but he thought he would leave it for some other time. Then they had drunk tea together. . . .

Paul looked again at the Banishment Order, embossed and unbelievable. The piece of paper, the notice to quit! This piece of paper was the Pass he waited for! The passport to darkness! Paul held it in front of him, his hands stretching stress lines across the awful message.

When had it started? With that first article? With the juice that flowed thick and gushing at times but dry and dripping today, the last day at Douglas House?

'For Christ's sake,' Paul said out loud to the morning air, 'how can they do it?'

Was the darkness to be the same as that in which Lereng now wallowed? Was he to be lost, his brain bewildered, his heart sick? Paul dropped the Order on to his desk and slumped down

into his chair. He picked up his pencil and stared at the lined pages on which he had been writing. His pencil drew a thick long line, vertical, dark. Below it he dug a large black spot, the pencil ground through the paper and the exclamation shouted at him. Kwenkwana, then Ralitapula, now himself. How had the torrent torn them from their path and would its roar never die?

Kwenkwana first, humble and ignorant. He stood up in the light of a searchlight and he stamped his foot in one last defiance. Then Ralitapula, winged and unvictorious, sick of soul and broken, living like a savage, hidden beneath the stones, huddling in a hut with a mad mate. . . .

Paul and Jessie had searched together amongst the rambling confusion of the townships. But there was no word of Ralitapula. Paul was ready to believe that he had fled at last back to the Malutis, back to the mountains and peace, when Mary in Mofolokohlo heard tell of a young man with a wounded arm. The young man lived with a girl in the shanty-town perimeter of Mofolokohlo. Old Paul asked her to say nothing about it, but she had told Paul, knowing how he and Jessie were searching. Paul had gone to Mofolokohlo and he talked to the people there and towards evening he was led to the place where Ralitapula hid. His guide was a young boy, ragged but cheerful, piping bright like his name, Pennywhistle.

Pennywhistle went on ahead and Paul followed obediently.

'I wish you were a doctor,' Pennywhistle said. 'You should be a doctor because he has a very sore arm.'

'Perhaps we can get a doctor.'

'Do you think so? That would be nice if we could.'

'Has he been here long?'

'We only found him last week. We were playing there and the girl called us.'

'Who is she, this girl?'

'His wife of course. Come. I'll show you.'

He hurried through the shacks and people stared at Paul. Another child ran with Pennywhistle for a few yards and they exchanged secrets. A woman shouted and the friend turned off with a happy cry.

'Tonight, then!'

Pennywhistle slowed down and he held a hand up behind him and when Paul caught up he took the hand that Pennywhistle offered. He leant forward and Pennywhistle whispered into his ear.

'That's her there,' he said, and he did not let go of Paul's hand.

The girl sat there on a brick, staring at the ground and it did not seem a strange thing for her to do. She was small and her young body was clothed in a filthy frock. A man lounged against the shack, sucking on a match. Pennywhistle kept close to Paul, still holding his hand. The man held up an arm as they approached and Paul saw that it was Ralitapula. His right hand was sunk deep into the pocket of his buttonless overalls. The overalls were old and torn and they hung open to show a bare stomach and chest. He had not shaved for many days. When he spoke he spoke in Fanakalo.

'Molo, 'Nkosi.'

'Ralitapula, it's you!'

'Ugwai, 'Nkosi?'

Paul hesitated, then he fumbled in his pockets and he produced a packet of cigarettes. Ralitapula took one and he raised a finger to his forehead in thanks.

' 'Nkosi,' he said.

Paul lit the cigarette for 'im.

'I have found you at last, Rali. They are giving up, man!'

'Kuhle!'

Pennywhistle, having lost the comfort of Paul's hand, moved over to the girl. He put a hand on her shoulder and watched. The girl stroked his leg, friendly but far away, as she too watched the strange man.

'Well, Rali, how's the arm? Jessie has been worried.'

Ralitapula only drew on his cigarette, filling his lungs with the smoke.

'It's me, Rali, Paul! Snap out of it, man!'

Ralitapula went into the hut and he came out with a box. He held the box out, offering it to Paul. Paul took it and Ralitapula motioned him to sit down and Paul did so. Ralitapula smoked the cigarette to its very end, holding the last piece of ash in the nails of thumb and forefinger and drawing in noisily before

letting the stompie drop. He ground the ash into the dust with his bare big toe.

'Jessie thinks perhaps she took the plaster off too soon. How does it feel?'

Ralitapula shrugged his shoulders and held his hand out for another cigarette. Paul gave him the packet and the box of matches. Ralitapula took out a cigarette with his teeth and put the pack in the top pocket of his overalls. His shoulders tilted as he moved his right arm, and the hand that held the box was shrivelled and twisted. He lit his own cigarette and he flicked the match on to the ground at Paul's feet. Paul picked it up.

'That hand looks bad. You could come with me to my mother's place, which is not far, and Jessie could look at the arm,' Paul said.

He scratched in the sand with the match, digging a small hole, flicking the dust into a tiny pile.

'Perhaps we should even take you to hospital, Rali.'

'That's how a sand bee digs,' Ralitapula said suddenly. 'It flicks the sand up with its legs and it dives in and is hidden.'

There was no life in Ralitapula's voice and Paul broke the match and his hand fidgeted with the pieces.

'What's that, Rali?' Paul asked, but there was no reply.

The girl did not move from her brick. Pennywhistle kept a hand on her shoulder as Paul got up.

'For Christ's sake, Rali, what is this? Don't you know me?' he shouted.

Pennywhistle dropped his hand from the friendly shoulder and stepped away.

'You can't just stand there like a wounded animal. Snap out of it. Come, let's get you fixed. At my mother's place.'

Paul caught hold of Ralitapula's sleeve, but Ralitapula stepped quickly away and his eyes flashed, wild and frightening.

'Rali, I . . .'

'Go! Get away!'

'Rali . . .'

'Go on.'

Ralitapula moved towards him and Paul stepped back.

'Leave us alone, damn you!'

Paul moved away again and he held out a hand behind him and Pennywhistle took it.

Ralitapula moved suddenly over to where the girl sat. She rose to her feet. Ralitapula slipped his hands under her flimsy frock and he eased the cloth from her shoulders. Then he pulled downwards and she stood still in front of him, naked to the waist. He looked at her for a while then he stepped around behind her and held her two arms tightly together and pushed her towards the hut. He held her there near the entrance to the shack and he turned to Paul again.

'Go on! Go!' he shouted.

Ralitapula tripped the girl as she bent down to enter the hut and he fell with her into the darkness.

Paul and Pennywhistle looked on and Pennywhistle's two hands held tight to Paul's fingers. There was the shuffling sound of a struggle and then there was a shrill horrible scream and Pennywhistle turned and ran, crying, away from the place.

Paul stood there a moment while the scream still sang in his ears and then he stooped into the hut. Ralitapula sat there in the awful light on top of the girl and he raised a knife and plunged it into her again. The knife was a short one and again Ralitapula stabbed. Paul flew at him and bowled him over on to the floor and it was as if he had tackled a dead man. Ralitapula's body was limp and unresistant. The knife fell from his hand and Paul saw it glint there on the floor beside the body of the girl. Ralitapula's legs lay across the girl's legs and he had fallen on his back, his arms limp.

Trembling, horribly aware of the blood around him, Paul fumbled for the matches in Ralitapula's overalls. He lit one and it flickered in the dark hut. He could not look at the girl and he could not look at the blood. He held the match above his friend and saw that Ralitapula's eyes were open and they were looking straight at him. His mouth moved and his lips slit into a smile.

'It's over now,' he said. 'It's over now, Paul, my friend. She came from the mountains. She came from the past to bewitch me, Paul. It is over now. The witch is dead. My soul is clean again, Paul. Help me up, my friend. It was an awful thing. Like a heavy

blanket thrown over me, stifling me, killing me. Oh the power of it, Paul, the power of it!'

Paul got up slowly and the match burnt to nothing in his fingers. He backed away out of the sinister presence of madness and when he was outside he turned and ran wildly, terrified, away from the place.

Paul picked up his pencil again.

'They are afraid of the day because they only know the night. They know the darkness of ignorance and falsehood and they feel the jet black darkness of their own skins and they are at peace with the night. Will they ever stand open-armed in the sunlight? Oh, my people! What pulls you back behind the dark clouds? What keeps you from the sun? I despair, I despair. I see you lying dead on a roadway with a silver bullet in your heart and I despair. I see you mad in the flickering light of a fire. I see you crazy under the spell of a witch, and I despair. . . .'

Mad in the flickering light of a fire! Paul bit on his pencil recalling the end of the story, brought to him in snatches by the boy Pennywhistle who had gone back to watch, bold, with his friend in the darkness. Paul himself had not turned back. He had hurried to his mother's house and he had stayed there until the next morning, hiding in the warm cocoon of a blanket, away from the madness.

The man had collected wood from the ash heap, Pennywhistle told him, and they saw him carrying the wood to his shack. People huddled around their small fires and as night fell the smoke hung heavy over the pile of stones.

There was not enough fuel for his fire at the ash dump, so he had wandered further into the township and there the houses were brighter and lamps shone from the windows. Cars stood in the street and in one of them he found a tin. He had hurried back then, carrying the tin, and smoke could be seen rising from the fire inside his shack. He went in and the fire must have been burning brightly because it glowed in there lighting up his shadow. He moved alone in there for a while and then he began to pull down the shack. He tore away the pieces of tin and the firelight shone through the sudden gaps. He came out from under the pieces for the last time and stretched a leg into the gap

that had been a doorway and he kicked the tin that held the fire.

The place burst and the man's shadow was for a moment dark beside him. He covered his eyes with his good arm and ran past, quickly away from the heat. There was shouting then and the flames lit up the shadows from which the children had been watching.

The flames found what food they could, and had they consumed the body of a witch?

Paul left the desk again and moved to the cupboard. He took out the coat that he had been wearing that day. He examined it and fingered the cloth of the flannels that hung beneath it. Both were laundry clean now, pressed and untainted. His meagre wardrobe mocked him and from a peg hung a University tie. The crest was golden, the head of a buck above a badge. He flicked the tie from the peg and he twisted it tight around his hand. He had to pack. He had to put all this away in a box and leave the place.

Someone shouted in the corridor outside Paul's room and a door banged. The hooter of a soap factory sounded clear at 7.15. Tharo from the next room put his head in.

'Coming to breakfast, Paul?'

'Carry on, Tharo, I'll be with you.'

Tharo slammed the door behind him and hurried down the passage, but he was back in a moment.

'Paul! Guess who's coming?'

'The Minister of the Interior!'

'Jessie! She's on the stairs.'

Tharo held the door open for Jessie and he bowed as she approached.

'Is he in?' Paul heard her ask and then she was there in the doorway. Tharo allowed himself a low whistle then withdrew, closing the door behind him.

'I've come to help you pack,' Jessie said.

Paul stood by the window awkward for a while, still twisting the tie around his hand.

'I was just starting to do so.'

'Looks like it,' Jessie said with a smile, surveying the shambles of the room. 'What about some coffee? I'm frozen.'

Jessie went straight to the cupboard, bent down and removed a cardboard box which lay inside the cupboard near Paul's shoes. She took the box to Paul's desk and Paul hurried to help her, clearing his papers on the desk and making room for the small primus.

'It was quite chilly this morning on the train,' Jessie said, and Paul took the primus out of its box and set it up. Jessie filled a small kettle from the basin tap. The tin of Nescafé, two cups and a jar of sugar were kept in the bottom drawer of Paul's desk. She took these out and Paul pumped the primus.

'Excuse the mess!' he said.

'I'll make your bed.'

'Please don't worry.'

'I'd like to, I've done it before! You fix the coffee.'

She pulled the bed away from the wall and stripped the blankets from it. She grabbed the straps of the mattress and deftly turned it. Dust rose from it.

'I've had lots of practice,' she said.

'I don't often turn it,' Paul admitted.

The primus was going now and Paul came to help.

'Take that end,' Jessie ordered, and together they spread the underblanket.

'Seems silly making the bed when I won't sleep in it again.'

'We can't leave the place looking like this.'

Jessie waited while Paul fumbled with a sheet.

'You've been writing this morning,' she said. 'Have I disturbed you?'

'No. I'm glad you came.'

'Was it a fond farewell to Dougal House or a letter to me?'

Paul dropped the corner of the sheet he was holding and he reached across the bed and caught Jessie's arm. His grip on her was firm and his fingers dug into her flesh.

'Why didn't they see that I was on their side? Why don't they open their eyes and see that I could help them?'

'Could you, Paul? Do they need help?' Jessie said, gently easing the vice from her arm. 'Here, just hold my hand.'

Paul caught the hand and he sat down on the bed pulling her down beside him.

'Not only me, Jessie, we could all help and yet we are turned away and we are expected to crawl back into oblivion. And we do crawl, Jessie, like a dog thrown out of a house. Eyes wide and pleading for forgiveness. Already prepared to forage for itself in the nearest rubbish heap.'

'You need never crawl.'

'And Ralitapula? What about Rali? Didn't he have something to offer and didn't he crawl under a stone back into darkness, afraid of the day? Didn't he, Jessie? You know the man and you wanted him.'

'He was sick, Paul.'

'Couldn't he have helped them? He and I and you, Jessie, we could all help!'

Paul sprang up on to the bed and he sat there cross-legged, Jessie's hand in his.

'You could help them! You and I could help them because we see and understand the best in them and we want to live by it. Isn't that so, Jessie?'

But Jessie did not have to answer.

'Why do you work on at your nursing? Why do you wear clean uniforms each day and why do you want to tidy up this room? Because you have picked up these little things that give you the *discipline* to do so. You have bowed to their system and you respect it. You are on their side. You're black but you're on their side.'

'Am I, Paul? I often wonder.'

'You're more on their side than your father is. Your children will be closer still if only they'll let them. Your father was like my father. He's a cook-boy.'

'Your father is a dear old man.'

'Of course, Jessie. He's a dear, simple old man.'

'There is often strength in simplicity.'

'It's not the simplicity, it's the faith! The blind faith that simple people have. What does this dear simple old man know about their modern world? Does he know the new rules? You know them, Jessie, the everyday disciplines, the basic rules. You've got them and because you've got them you're on their

side. It's not us they must hate! Ignorance, cruelty, disease and barbarism are their enemies, not us! Why can't they see it?'

Paul pulled Jessie's hands up to his face and he pressed them to his cheeks.

'Sorry,' he whispered, 'I'm sorry, Jessie.'

The kettle rattled and hissed on the primus, demanding attention. Jessie got up to make coffee.

'You need not crawl back to Pondoland,' she said.

Paul flopped back full length on the bed; he put his hands under his head and he stared at the unresponsive ceiling. There was nothing there this time, no chinks of light, no cockroach on a beam, only the white even discipline of the flat ceiling.

Jessie brought the cups and she sat down on the bed.

'Sit up,' she ordered.

'Just put it down. Yours too.'

Paul reached up and pulled at the collar of her uniform.

'Come down here.'

'Have it while it's hot.'

Paul turned over and, leaning on one elbow, the saucer insecure on the bed, he drank the hot coffee. Jessie sipped quietly staring in front of her, thinking of a man who hid himself in a pile of stones.

There was a heavy knock on the door and Paul shouted from where he lay. Tharo entered with a plate in each hand.

'How's that for service?' he said. 'I sneaked it out the side doors.'

'Tharo, you're a friend!'

'Wedding breakfast for my flighty birds. Bacon and eggs and mush from yesterday's mince. Got weapons?'

'There's a knife and fork in the drawer. We'll be fine, thanks, Tharo.'

Tharo held the plates above the desk.

'Not much room here!' he said. 'I'll put them on the chair and leave you to it.'

'Thanks, Tharo.'

'That was a nice thought,' Jessie said, when Tharo had gone.

'He's a good chap, Tharo.'

'You'll miss your friends.'

'Yes, I'll miss them.'

He took her hand and she bent forward and kissed him lightly on the lips.

'Remember old Petrus,' she said. 'Find a quiet place, somewhere where the pink birds stand in the cool water!'

'We don't seem to have found it.'

'We haven't tried.'

'How do you mean?'

'We've both been too busy. That's the new discipline you talk about. Play according to the rules. It's a hard ruthless game, Paul.'

'Would you like to give it up?'

'Sometimes I think so. Sometimes I think I would like to find that quiet place and give up.'

'Forever?'

'No, not forever, just for a while so that I could catch up with myself.'

Paul pulled her down again and this time she relaxed there, her head on his chest. He stroked her gently and as his hands ran down her back and touched lightly on her thighs he longed not for cool quietness but for the hot promise of her.

'Even beneath the starch I feel you soft and loveable,' he said.

'What about breakfast?'

She laughed a little as his fingers undid the top buttons of her uniform.

'Dear Paul, you're so confused, aren't you?'

Paul slipped his hand into the exciting breach she had allowed him to make and he whispered into her ear, warm, gay and expectant.

'Come with me, Jessie. Come with me into exile!'

12

To Mary the reason was clear. They were afraid of Paul. They were afraid that he would learn too much while he was away in

America and that he would come back and be angry. They did not want an angry, clever man. They did not even want a clever man. All they wanted was a dull-eyed man with a pick or a shovel.

'But they have taught him here at the University,' Old Paul complained. 'They have shown him things that you and I can only dream about. He has books on shelves and these books come from England and America and other places that we will never see. He reads these books and other men teach him through them. Now is the time for him to go to the places in which these men live and talk to them. Talk, Mary, one man to another man, so that the movement of a hand, the look in an eye or even the sounds around them will have meaning to both. That is the way to learn, Mary! He must go out and talk to these people and see how they live and share in the things that trouble them.'

'But it is not to be,' Mary said. 'It is not to be because they are afraid.'

Old Paul wished that he could help. He wished that he could somehow help his son over this new hurdle so that afterwards when letters came from America he could read them to his friends and he could tell them—I have another letter from my son in America. He would read the letters aloud and he would be proud and he would wait for Paul to return and then perhaps with the wisdom that was gathered there in America, Paul could help his own people to see with clearer eyes and he could help them to lift themselves up out of their ignorance. He thought then of his brother Mashupa and of the land that would not yield and he thought of the pictures he had seen in American magazines that his son had shown him, of vast fields of corn which were mown neatly by huge red machines.

At first he had some small hope that Baas Koos would try to help. He was young and these days youth was strong. They were strong because the older people were leaning on them, leaning heavily and saying to them—The future is yours, my son, you are the one to see that the stones of the laager wall are well laid. Baas Koos wore a special uniform now and he rode through the streets on a fine horse carrying a horn which was the sign of the new state. The horn was once used to carry powder into battle, so it was said. Now it was the symbol of some victory or of some

sorrow perhaps. Now young men rallied around the symbol and added powder to the dying ashes of the past. Malipakaniswa iPondo lwayo. May her horn rise high!

Because of these things Baas Koos was confused. There was a kindness there and an eagerness to help, but it was only lost in the confusion. What was kindness alone? What was the will to stand up if it only brought a man half-rising to his feet? His was a weak will and there was far too much excitement in the new uniform and in the new hope for a weak will to prevail.

Following the banishment of his son and finding that he could do nothing about it, Old Paul made a decision of his own. He borrowed a large trunk from Mary and this he packed with his belongings and on top of it, with rope, he tied his blankets and a pillow. He swept out his room and he took his Reference Book from its place in the small cupboard drawer and he went to resign from the services of Mr van Staden.

'Nkosi,' he said as he stood where he had stood so many times on payday. 'Will the Nkosi please sign my book?'

'I've signed it, Paul. When I paid you. I do that every month.'

'Yes, Nkosi. You have signed for the month, just as you have signed every month, and there is a long list of the same mark in my book. Your name is there to make each month safe with the law. But this time, Nkosi, I want you to sign in the last place. To sign me off, Nkosi.'

'You mean you want to leave us!'

'Yes, Nkosi.' Paul held out his Reference Book in both hands.

'What's wrong, Paul? Money?'

'It is not money, Nkosi.'

'You want to go back home?'

Home, where was home? Was it there in Mofolokohlo? Or here at Baas van Staden's? Or back in Pondoland, sharing the piece of land with his brother Mashupa? The piece of land which did not produce vast fields of corn to be cut by red machines, but which was home. That was it perhaps. That was the way to answer Baas van Staden.

'Yes, Nkosi. I am going home.'

'After all these years?'

'My brother is still there, Nkosi.'

'You have never spoken of your family. You never spoke of home.'

'But now, 'Nkosi, now I am speaking of home. Now I must go.'

He left and he took the large trunk in a taxi to the station and he went back to Mofolokohlo and there he asked Mary once again to marry him and to come with him to Pondoland.

Old Paul had £42 in his Post Office Savings Bank. Mary had £185 in notes hidden in a tin in a secret place in the house. Paul had only £11 and Mr Simangu wanted £30 lobolo for Jessie. Sixty rands, Mr Simangu said, because the number was higher and the sound of sixty pleased him. Mary's savings had been hard won by the pound and a fancy change in the name could not change the faith of a lifetime. Thirty pounds it was and thirty pounds Mr Simangu would have, for Jessie was worth it and more.

'If we lend you twenty pounds from the Ndizile fund you can pay Simangu!' Mary said.

'How is our fund?' Old Paul asked.

Mary tore off the sheet of her note-book on which she had written her small sums. The figure £208 was heavily underlined.

'That makes £208 for two new homes in Pondoland!' she said. 'Now, Paul, you will be in charge of buying building material. We must do it here in Vereeniging and rail it to Pondoland. Here we can see what we are buying and I have some friends in the trade.'

'Yes, mother.'

'Make a list.'

'Yes, mother.'

Mary gave Paul a clean sheet of paper. Paul took a pencil from his coat pocket and headed the page—Building Material, Approximate Cost.

Mary drew a small sketch of a square hut with a window in each wall and a sloping tin roof. She gave the diagram dimensions and between them they conjured up rough estimates of material. 3" x 2" poles for roof support @ 2/- a running foot. 8' x 3' corrugated iron sheets @ 30/- a sheet. Nails, wire, cement, tools, window frames.

'But the walls!' Mary said. 'What of the walls?'

'We'll make them of mud, Mary, mud and straw,' Old Paul said.

'We will not use mud. We will use iron, wood and iron!'

'But they build round huts in Pondoland.'

'Ours will be square, strong and square!'

Paul did not care about the shape of a hut to live in and he did not worry about walls of mud. He made the list as his mother and his father wished, but his mind wandered from the pathetic practicalities of their decision.

It must have been the tax number in his father's Reference Book. A number that referred to the district in which he had first paid tax. The tax number and the tribe! That would have led them to Mashupa Ndizile, brother of Paul Ndizile who was registered in Johannesburg as a domestic servant. Well then, easily enough, that is Paul Ndizile's home. That's where his father came from, that's where he came from! What better place to send a troublesome young man than to a hill in Pondoland on the edge of the Indian Ocean?

But when he was there what would he do? What would they all do? How would they earn a living and how could Mary operate a tea-cart? And Jessie? What could Jessie do?

'We must think of plough and seed,' Old Paul was saying. 'After we have built the huts we must help Mashupa, my brother, who lives on the land. Perhaps we will have to buy another field with the money and we must grow mealies and tobacco and sell them to Zamakulungisa.'

'Who's he?' Mary asked.

'He is the white man who trades near our home. He will buy what we grow and he will sell us a plough and help us with the small things that we need. Like tea and sugar and matches and paraffin for our lamps.'

'Can he sell us land?'

'Not land, but most other things. The land we shall have to buy from Shixini, the Headman. We shall go to him and he will let us choose another field and we will pay him for it.'

'Even if you have a large field, can you make things grow?'

This was what worried Old Paul. The land was sick. If you

had more of sick soil was it not merely more of a burden that you had? Would there ever be the red machines in the green fields? Was there not some other way in which the money that he and Mary had saved could be made to produce? Then again, had not Mary been right the first time? She should not leave a life in which she had been able to save a hundred and eighty-five pounds. Not only save it, but she had a house and friends and she had paid for the things her son needed at school and at the University, and Mofolokohlo was her home.

'The land is sick,' Old Paul said, then he turned to Mary as if he wanted to confirm with her that her mind was made up. 'It is sick, Mary,' he repeated. 'It may yield if we look after it, but it will be hard.'

'We go!' Mary said. 'That is for sure! We go, all of us! They cannot say to Paul—Return to where you've never been, and expect us only to watch! We go! All of us, and it is only a matter of what we do when we get there.'

They talked this way about what they would do when they got there, until darkness fell. They talked about new land and about the sea and about new homes and about the country that was truly theirs. It was theirs to build and they would build it.

'There was a clinic there, I remember,' Old Paul said, 'near Zamakulungisa's store. The people came down for injections and for medicine and the very sick were taken away from the clinic in the ambulance. There, at the clinic, Jessie can work, for is she not a nurse? While Paul writes, Jessie can work at the clinic.'

It was mostly Mary's money that they talked about and it was Mary's money that Paul used when they made their purchases in Vereeniging. There was excitement and cheerful chatter and all the time Mary was handing out her precious notes. Paul would count them and later, building material was delivered to the station. Mary did a quick deal with a woman called Henrietta, selling her the tea-cart and its goodwill for £22 and she went happily on with her arrangements for the forthcoming party in her old home in Mofolokohlo.

It would be a double wedding and a great farewell. The Ndiziles were getting married! Old Paul and Mary and Paul

and Jessie. It would be a great party and Philemon Sitole with his white collar would marry them.

And so it was. Mary and Jessie dressed together in Mary's bedroom and there were many helpers who crowded out the small house. Old Paul put on his dark suit and Paul, the Banished, wore his pressed coat and flannels. Mr Simangu was there too in his tramway uniform and Jessie was a bright young bride. There were tears from the women when Philemon Sitole took her hand and there was singing when the old people and the young people were married. The honeymoon would be by the sea and the couples would build a new life in Pondoland!

When Paul and Jessie kissed there were sobs from the women and tears came to Jessie's eyes and she heard the women say to one another, Hau, shame! in their pitying women's voices and she still did not quite understand what she was doing. She thought of her father and she held tightly to Paul's arm, leaning heavily on him. Her hands were hot and there was a tightness around her heart and she prayed a little in Zulu, and when the singing started she could not hold her tears. Paul led her gently away and the people left them alone in Mary's room where they sat for a while till the sobs went away. The noise of the party came loudly to them through the thin door.

'Hullo, my Paul,' Jessie said, and Paul kissed her lightly and she was comforted a little.

'We'll make a go of it down there, Jessie. We will build a home and there will be singing and laughter down there too.'

When Jessie was ready to go back, Paul opened the door and he saw that Old Paul had been standing there defending their privacy. Old Paul took Jessie's hand as she stepped out and he held it in both of his.

'There will be a new beauty down there,' he said. 'You, my dear, will make the hills shout their welcome and there will be happiness.' He placed her arm over his son's arm and he guided the two out into the turmoil of the wedding feast.

Towards nightfall welcome strangers came to join the merriment. They came up to the house and they inquired whose party it was and then they went to Mary and they introduced themselves. Mary shook hands with them and offered them beer and

the party grew happily. One small boy asked for Mr Ndizile and Paul went out to him taking with him a handful of sweets. The piccanin waited in the darkness by the birdbath with its tin bird and he took the sweets from Paul and passed on his message.

'Nkosi,' he said, 'I have a message from Mr Masindile.'

'Masindile? He's in jail.'

'You must come with me.'

'I am at a wedding!'

'He says you must come with me. It is not far.'

The piccanin was already hurrying off.

'It is just nearby,' he said over his shoulder.

Paul followed and the piccanin ran. There were a few cars parked outside Mary's house and the piccanin hurried up to the last of these. It was a beetle-back Hudson sedan with small windows.

'What is this?' Paul said as he ran up, and then he saw Shakes at the wheel.

'It is us, Paul, come to wish you luck on your wedding day.'

Paul bent down, level with the car window and he saw that there were two other men inside, one sitting in the back. A torch flicked on and Shakes shone it into the face of the man slouched in the back seat.

'Hullo, Paul,' Ralitapula said. 'Congratulations. How's the bride?'

Ralitapula had a beard now but it was well-trimmed. He was smiling too. Shakes swung the torch over to the man sitting in the front seat with him.

'And Chocolate Dhlamini,' he said.

Then he held the torch under his own chin so that the lines of his face were lit up and he was a child playing ghosts.

'And me, Shakes!'

Shakes chuckled and the torch clicked off. Paul heard his own frightened voice.

'What do you want with me?'

'Ag, Paul, that's no way to talk, man! What do you want with me! We're old friends, Paul.'

'What's come over you, Paul?' Ralitapula said, and Paul was

surprised to hear the familiar voice, light and controlled again. What had he expected, the screech of a madman?

'But you were in jail, Shakes?'

'I was in jail, Paul, yes, yes, I was in jail. Didn't you get a message from us?'

'Yes. The piccanin gave it to me.'

'No, Paul, no. An earlier one, man, telling you that we were all just fine in jail. Humphrey had lost his saxophone and Golden was having trouble with a European warder?'

'Not a word. Only this little fellow just now.'

'Christ, the system is slipping! Anyhow you saw Chocolate's pictures? That one of Rali and Kwenkwana, that was good, hey? Rali standing there with his arm in the air, handcuffs blinking in the searchlight. Man, but Chocolate is a cream chocolate, a dream chocolate, he's a genius!'

Shakes gave Chocolate a friendly punch and laughed.

'Ah, but who wrote the story!' Chocolate said.

'I did, Paul,' Shakes responded loudly. 'The following Saturday came the eyewitness report. That was me! Shakes Masindile! The story was written on Bronco smuggled by a house-breaker. You didn't see it? Man, the system!'

'I did see it.'

'We smuggled it out. It's a good system. We had news coming in too. You know, so many fellows coming in and out, little notes here and there kept us in the news. By the way Mermaid's fine too. Getting a little thinner, but Golden says she still laughs!'

Shakes reached out of the window and grabbed Paul's coat.

'Remember Mermaid, the heathen bitch?' he whispered, then he slapped the door with an open palm.

Ralitapula leant forward and, resting his hands on the back of the seat, he spoke calmly to Paul.

'We've got a good crowd of boys,' he said, 'they needed Shakes out of there so they got him out. We've been together now for some time, Paul. They're a good crowd.'

'Ja, that's it,' Shakes said. 'They're a good crowd, and that's why we came to wish you luck on your wedding day, Paul. We've heard all about you. You're good news value, boy. Paul Ndizile, the Banished. Those wings of yours sure get you around, man!'

'We can help you, Paul,' Ralitapula said from the darkness.

'You can help me?'

'If you'll help us, we'll help you.'

'How, Rali, how?'

'We need someone down there that we can trust.'

'Down where?'

'In Pondoland, man, in Pondoland.'

'What can I do?'

'We'll let you know, boy. Are you with us?'

With them? With conspirators in the darkness? With an old friend and mad murderer? With Shakes Masindile, escaped from jail?

'We'll contact you,' Ralitapula said, slumping back into his seat. 'Sorry we can't come to the party. Give Jessie my love!'

'Ja, congratulations,' Shakes said, then he started the car, waved an arm out of the window and drove off.

Paul hurried back to the house and he went straight to Jessie and took her hand. She squeezed it and smiled at him and raised a glass to him.

'Oh you creatures,' a fat woman howled, 'oh you beautiful creatures.'

III

MAZIBUYA

13

The land was called Pondoland and the Ndiziles were Pondos, so there was some truth in the thought that the land was theirs. Certainly, when they arrived at Umtata there was great excitement at the station and there were black faces all round.

Paul climbed off the train and shooed away a bare-breasted woman who wanted to sell him a stick of sweet cane. He went to the compartment window and Old Paul passed the luggage outside to him and he made a large pile of it on the platform. Jessie and Mary stood by the pile and when Old Paul had emptied the compartment he got out too and walked at once away to a stall where he could buy some tobacco. Real, dry, Pondo tobacco.

'Icuba lesiXhosa!' he said and he crushed a few leaves into a dry dust and rolled them into a brown-paper cigarette like those that Hamilton smoked. Old Paul smoked it the right way round.

The luggage pile was large, made up of the odd shapes of their several bundles and boxes. It was checked and rechecked by Mary and Jessie. They stood around it and Old Paul smoked his harsh tobacco. Mary held Jessie's hand and Paul argued with a porter.

'I can't take it to the bus,' the porter insisted. 'The bus leaves from another place.'

'There's lots of time.'

'It's way over there,' the porter said. 'I can't wheel my trolley out into the street.'

'He can't wheel his trolley out into the street!' Paul said, turning to the others. 'We'll have to carry it.'

'Carry it, I'll help you carry it,' the porter offered, 'but I can't take my trolley into the street.'

He loaded himself with bundles, leaving his trolley, and while the others helped him Paul went to the Goods Office to see about the building material.

The clerk at the Goods Office thumbed through the notes on his clip-board.

'Ndizile? Ndizile? Ah yes,' he said. 'Consigned to Mashupa Ndizile of Headman Shixini. Do you want to take it?'

'Yes, we want to take it.'

'Just sit down there, friend, I'll go and see.'

The clerk disappeared into the store room and Paul sat down to wait. When the clerk came back he was laughing.

'Hau, Ndizile! You're going to build a bridge!'

'It's all here?'

'All of it, wood and cement, the lot.'

'Good. I'll sign for it.'

'Now wait, boy, wait. How you going to move this stuff?'

'On top of the bus, I suppose.'

The clerk laughed again slapping the clip-board on the counter.

'The Bambela, man. Never!'

'We'll hire a truck then.'

'Mayibabo!' the clerk said. 'There you have something!'

He leant forward on the counter eager to gossip.

'Back from Johannesburg?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'How's business up there?'

'Business is all right.'

'Good jobs you have? Cost money that stuff you brought.'

'One of us had a good job.'

The clerk looked at the slip of paper which he had taken from the clip-board.

'Ndizile? You must fly away all the time!'

The clerk laughed at his own joke but Paul only nodded, grinning patiently.

'Maybe that's it. We fly away all the time. How can we get this material to Mashupa's?'

'Ndizile is a funny name. Mine's Jujura. Wayside Jujura.'

'Pleased to meet you, Jujura. You like it here in Umtata?' Paul asked with exaggerated politeness.

'The money is not good.'

'But you like it here? You have a house?'

'I have a house, yes. I live there with my wife and my mother and my sister is there too and two cousins. We have a son and a baby girl. We all work, the grown-ups I mean. We all work here in Umtata. What are you going to build with all this stuff?'

'We are going to build huts and we are going to live on the land. We have come back, you see. Back to the land.'

'There's been trouble here. You should have stayed up there in Johannesburg.'

'There's trouble everywhere.'

'There's Government trouble here. There's soldiers and tanks and guns all over Pondoland.'

The clerk leant forward and in a hoarse whisper told Paul today's secret.

'There's guns coming in from a submarine,' he confided. 'They land at night.'

'Yes? And where do these guns come from?'

The clerk leant further forward and this time his whisper was hissed and important as if he himself were the instigator of all the excitement.

'Russia!' he whispered and he shivered behind his counter and crumpled the paper in his hand.

'What are the people going to do with them?' Paul asked.

'We are going to get Freedom. Like all the other black countries in Africa. We are going to get Government.'

'Just like that? Get Freedom with a gun?'

'That's it. That's why they've brought the soldiers and the tanks and all.'

'To stop you getting Freedom?'

'That's it.'

'But we are going to be free anyhow, aren't we? This place is for us. There's nothing here, but we can have this place. That's what they say.'

'That's what who says?'

'The Government, Jujura. This is the first Bantustan. We belong here. It's ours.'

'Call me Wayside. You got to report to the police?'

'How did you know?'

'We know, Ndizile. We know.'

He nodded towards the door and Paul turned to look out on to the platform.

'They're going to save you the trouble,' Wayside said.

Two men in uniform and a man in a dark suit were standing on the platform talking to a railway inspector. Wayside knew the inspector but the others were soldiers. One was a sergeant. The man in the suit worked at the Chief Magistrate's office.

'Soon there will be only black police here and black men at the Magistrate's office,' Wayside whispered.

Paul recognized the inspector. He had travelled on the train with them. He was the one who clipped their tickets.

'The inspector was on our train,' he said.

The men on the platform turned and walked towards the Goods Office. Paul stood up when the men came in and Wayside picked up his clip-board again.

'Are you Paul Ndizile?' the man in the dark suit asked.

'I am.'

'I am from the Magistrate's office. I have instructions to see that you leave Umtata by tomorrow evening and take up your abode in the prescribed area. Sergeant van Staden here will arrange transport to the district, which is now under his control. You are not to leave the district until further advised by him.'

Paul looked at the sergeant. He studied the sunburnt roughness of his skin and the big-dog simplicity of his eyes. He had a job to do, did Sergeant van Staden. Paul Ndizile was a great responsibility. Van Staden, is your name Koos?

'A friend of mine at University was named van Staden. Koos van Staden, any relation?'

'Now come on you,' van Staden said. 'I want you out of here. Got your impahla? I'll take you in the van.'

'Actually, I was just inquiring about my impahla,' Paul said.

'What's he got?' the inspector asked, and Wayside fumbled with the consignment notes.

'Ja, 'Nkosi. Ndizile,' he mumbled. 'He's got 36 sheets of corrugated iron, 8' x 3½'; 48 10' lengths of 3" x 2" clear pine; 1 roll chicken wire . . .'

'Let me look at that!' Sergeant van Staden snatched the note from Wayside who now only grinned at his empty hands.

'What you going to do with all this stuff?' he demanded.

'We're going to build our homes,' Paul said.

'We? Who's we?'

'My wife and I and my mother and my father.'

Sergeant van Staden looked at the Magistrate's official representative who in turn looked at the inspector. The constable stood back a little and bit on his chin-strap.

'There were four of them,' the inspector offered.

'Perhaps you could take us all in your van,' Paul said.

'Quiet, you! Where's your wife?'

'She's waiting at the bus terminus. We were going to catch this afternoon's Bambela.'

'And this stuff?' van Staden shook the note at Paul.

'We didn't know it had arrived. We can't take it on the bus,' he said. 'There's too much of it.'

The men looked at one another again. It was a long list.

'What about your van?' Paul asked again. 'There's a little furniture too.'

'Quiet, you!'

The van wouldn't take all that stuff, Sergeant van Staden thought, but there was a troop transport at the station, a three-ton army truck. That would do the job. Take the whole bloody lot of them.

He gave instructions to the constable who manœuvred his chin-strap under his chin with a deft twitch of his jaw, saluted smartly then marched away.

'Now listen, you,' van Staden said turning again to Paul, 'I want you out of here.'

'I appreciate that.'

'Shut up! The truck can pick up all your stuff and then it'll come to the bus terminus. Better you all be there, see!'

'We will, sergeant, we will. Am I free now?'

'I want to see the best of you.'

The chatter and laughter of the crowd at the bus terminus subsided as Paul approached followed by the sergeant and the Government official. Mary and Jessie sat together on a wooden bench and Old Paul sat on top of a roll of blankets, smoking. Old Paul got up when his son approached.

'This is my father,' Paul said as he came up to them. 'Father, this is Sergeant van Staden and an official from the Magistrate's office. They are going to help us get to Mashupa's.'

'That is kind of them,' Old Paul said.

Paul moved to the bench and he took Jessie's hand and Jessie rose to her feet. Mary remained seated.

'Sergeant van Staden, this is my wife Jessie and my mother Mary Ndizile.'

Sergeant van Staden looked around him and he pointed to the pile of baggage.

'Is this all yours?' he asked.

'We had to bring everything,' Mary said from the bench.

'That's all of you then?'

'Yes, that's all,' Paul said.

'What's your tax number?' van Staden asked Old Paul, talking in Xhosa.

'I pay tax in Johannesburg,' Old Paul said, and he fumbled for his Reference Book. 'But I have left Johannesburg now. I worked there for a long time and Mr van Staden signed my Pass.'

'That's enough of that! See you all get on the truck when it comes.'

'We will, sergeant. We will,' Paul promised.

The sergeant and the official left then and the Ndiziles settled down to wait. There was much interest amongst the crowd at the terminus and the chatter rose to a higher pitch. Men came up to introduce themselves to Paul Ndizile, from Johannesburg.

The truck arrived already laden with the building material. It was driven by the constable and an African rode with him in the cab. There was a shout from the waiting crowd and Mary jumped as it approached and jerked her thumb in the air.

'Give us a lift,' she shouted and she slapped her thighs with her open hand and laughed.

The truck stopped and the constable got out.

'Load your stuff,' he ordered.

Mary let out a delighted shriek and lifted a bundle above her head and threw it into the back of the truck. Eager hands helped her and then a strange man was in the truck standing on the baggage offering Mary a hand. Mary put her foot on the wheel and she was helped up into the back of the lorry. She waved to the crowd and thumped her fist on the roof of the cab.

'Hey you, stop that!' the constable shouted.

A man in a red blanket came up to Paul and spoke to him.

'Nkosi,' the man said, 'can I ride with you? Mashupa's land is not far from mine and I have to pay for the bus, and then walk a long way. Please, Nkosi, can I ride with you in the army truck?'

Paul patted the man's shoulder and went up to the constable.

'Officer,' he said, 'this is very kind of you and I wonder if we could take this old man along too. He lives near us.'

'Uyaphi?' the constable asked and the old man told him. 'Wait, man, wait. Let me count now.'

Mary and Old Paul and Jessie were on the lorry.

'That's three up there,' the constable said.

'And me and my friend,' Paul said. 'That makes five of us. Only five altogether, officer.'

'Ag, O.K. Get on, man, get on!'

The constable returned to the cab and Paul helped the tribal man to climb on. He was clumsy in his long blanket and he held a stick and a bundle in his left hand. He laughed as he was tumbled in.

'Official transport,' Mary said as she settled herself on top of the pile of luggage.

There was a rumble of thunder from the cloud line that hung over the coast and the crowd cheered as the army truck moved off, carrying the Ndiziles home.

Old Paul pulled on the brown-paper cigarette, the taste of the tobacco and the smell of the smoke were so familiar, as if it were only yesterday that he had left. He sat on a bundle in the back of the rumbling truck and when it left the main road he watched the cloud of dust that rose behind, to be rolled away into the veld by a strong cross wind. There was the smell of rain in the

wind and the country needed rain. Old Paul remembered Kwenkwana's words about the rains that were late and he hung his head, for soon he would see his brother who would want to know more than the letter had told him.

It was raining and Mashupa sat in the doorway of his hut. He watched the water gather in small pools on his hard-worn threshold, then run away in snaking rivulets to join the greater flow from the drip ditch around his hut. The rain came down hard for a while and it fell in a bright curtain from the apron of the thatched roof. It was clear and joyful until it splashed into the brown flow on the ground. Then it added its volume to the growing stream which was rushing eagerly away from the hut down to Mashupa's sloping field. These rains were early, too early, and they tore at the old field. Last year the land had been ploughed by Zamakulungisa's red tractor which had pulled the plough fast across the slope. It was better that way, the driver explained. Better to plough across so that the rain, when it comes, will fill the ruts and not flow rapidly down, taking the soil with it. Mashupa and Poto had planted and last year the light green shoots looked fine and strong.

The rain settled into a lighter drizzle and Mashupa smiled. That was better. The land had time to suck up such rain. It would seep deep and it was a shame there were no small young roots to be nourished. He pulled his blanket close around his throat and, hunched there in the doorway, he thought of how cruel the seasons could be. How they would help a small plant to grow, give it drink when it was young so that its hope was strong. Then the sun would shine and the plant would turn a darker green and its leaves would grow long and firm. Then somehow the plant reached an age when it could not grow any more. Perhaps the rain would not come again. Perhaps the sun would remain for too long and the edges of the leaves would be yellow and the stalk would turn brown. The sun laughed then and the roots would show dry and coarse above the ground, like the roots of those trees that grow close to the banks of the Kuphela. But these small ones did not dip into water. They dipped into the dry soil from which they could suck nothing. There might be a

great storm, too late. Even though the tractor had gone across the field, the water would break a path down the hill and when the sun came out again you could see that the plant was trying to offer its fruit to the one who had planted it, but that its fruit was shrivelled and unhealthy. There was no unhappier task than reaping a poor field.

Mashupa threw his blanket off, determined not to think of these things for surely this year was a better year? Under his blanket he wore his old trousers. They were held up by a dark leather belt with a brass buckle. Nothandile had given him that belt. Last winter after Nowinile had died Nothandile had gone away for three months and then she had come back with a new dress and a suitcase and some cloth and this belt for him and a shirt for Poto. She had gone to Libode and she worked there making fires in the morning and scrubbing floors in a white man's house. But there was another woman there, also working, and she was from across the river and she was evil, Nothandile said. She had cut the heart from a bull-frog and she had dried it in the sun and crushed it to a powder and she had sprinkled the powder over Nothandile's blanket and had Nothandile stayed she would have been bewitched.

Mashupa pulled the belt tight around his waist and stood a while in the doorway. Then he stepped out into the fine rain and walked down to his field.

The rain was cool on his bare back and it gathered in shiny droplets on his furry skull. The mud felt smooth and comforting between the toes of his good foot. He stopped and grabbed the mud with his toes, working his foot deeper. There were stones down there and under the thin wet layer it was hard and rough. He walked down to the bottom of the field. He stood there where his land ended and he turned back and looked up towards his hut. This was not a good hill really. It would one day go dry and sandy like that across the valley. Down towards the river there were better fields. There were some good ones on the banks of the river. But there the floods came down some years and ripped your crop away. But even that risk would be better than this hill. Who was he to ask Shixini for land down there by the river? For all men wanted that land.

At least his hut was a good one. It was firm and well built and the thatch did not leak and from it you could see the sea. He turned towards the sea. Out there the water was falling on water and who would notice the difference out there? Ships went past sometimes and the people on the ships would be inside, looking out of the round holes. Down at the rocks there might be someone fishing. It was good to fish in the rain. The damba came in at high tide and perhaps it was because the light was not so bright that they were unafraid of the gullies and pools. He and Poto had been down to the rocks more often since Kwenkwana left. At low tide they had found a huge tangle of line that you could see through and they had pulled the bunch from the rocks and at the end of it there was a piece of lead and a hook. The hook was rusted but the lead was all right and the line too. The line was strong still. They had taken the tangle of it up to their hut and there they undid it, pulling out great loops until they had line to fish with.

Fishing with a pole and the line like that and with a new hook which Zamakulungisa had given him, was better than breaking shell-fish from the rocks as the women did. He and Poto had pulled in many at night and once something had taken the small crab that he had used for bait and it had pulled so hard that he could hardly hold the pole and then the tip of the pole had snapped and he was left only with the rest of it. It must have been a huge fish that. The pole was too short afterwards and he had to cut another and he had to untangle another length of line and get another hook.

You needed a long pole when fishing from the gullies. You needed one that you could hold far out when the damba were there. And sometimes when they were there the bait would only touch the water and it would be taken and truly a man could not starve when the sea gave as it did on those days.

Mashupa crouched down and looked at the stub of one of last season's plants. Perhaps it was better to live only by the sea. To build a hut down there and live close to the sea and forget about the land. One could go no further. When the land will not feed you you can always go down to the edge of it and live in a cave even, sucking at shell-fish and building fires from driftwood.

Mashupa stood up, uncomfortable by the thought. He saw Poto standing in the doorway of the hut. He held up a hand and Poto waved.

Poto was a good child. He was not too strong but he helped in the field. One day he would go out to work, just as Kwenkwana had done. Would he send money? Or would he only ask someone to write a letter and say 'I am here in the town and I have found your brother Paul and he will find work for me'? Nothing about the factory. Nothing about bicycles. Just that he was there in the town. Even as Paul had gone away so many years ago, so would Poto go. And then would there be another letter to follow the first? 'Your son was killed here by the police and we have buried him.' A letter like that you could not believe, a letter that lied like all the others.

Mashupa wiped the rain from his face with his hand and he walked back towards the hut. As he walked he looked inland towards the road that led away from this dying place, towards the unknown, deep in there. The sled track was a stream now, the water red and rushing, cutting channels down the path. Once he had seen Zamakulungisa's oxen come running along that sled track. It was dry then, and dust rose from their hooves. He thought he heard the drone of an aeroplane and he looked upwards into the clouds wondering how a man could see to fly in this. Planes often came over this place. They stayed close to the line of the shore, he had been told. They came up this way from Baai to Tekwene. Sometimes they flew low over the sea, skimming the waves. The rain tickled his eyelids and he wiped his face with his hand again.

He looked inland again, still hearing the droning noise of the aeroplane. It was not the usual sound. It was as if the flying man were trying to get away from the storm. The engine hummed louder and it was not an even sound. Perhaps he will come down through these clouds!

Then he saw it. He saw the lorry coming towards him along the sled track. It loomed huge in the misty drizzle and its tyres churned their way through the wet earth and the lorry slid from side to side as the engine roared. But it was coming and it was coming up the track to his hut! .

'Nothandile!' he shouted, shuffling back to the hut. 'Poto! Nothandile!'

Nothandile came out of the hut and she looked. She held Poto's arm as if he might run out and get in the way of the approaching lorry and she stood there thinking of the dust of a bull-frog's heart on her blanket and dreading the evil that this huge thing was to bring.

Sitting on the edge of the truck near the left side window was Mbangcolo, whom Mashupa knew. Mbangcolo climbed down when the truck stopped and then Mashupa saw there were other people in the back of the truck.

Mounds moved and out of them came people. They were all wet and then a policeman got out of the cab. The driver did not move, but he shouted something to the policeman who came up to Mashupa.

'You are Mashupa Ndizile?'

'Nkosi.'

'You are?'

'Nkosi. Mashupa and Nothandile.' But Nothandile had moved further into the hut and only her head showed and lower down the face of her son, Poto.

Mbangcolo came to him then and he held out his hand and their fingers touched lightly.

'Molo, Mashupa.'

'Molo.'

'Sesifikhile.'

There was much movement now at the back of the truck and then an old man wrapped in a damp blanket came towards them. The man held out his hand and Mashupa touched his fingers too and he looked into the man's face and he saw that it was his brother Paul. It was he, come suddenly out of the mist in a lorry, driven by a policeman.

'It is I, Mashupa. Paul, your brother.'

'You are wet, you must come inside.'

'The women should go inside. The men must unload the truck.'

Mary hurried past them and sheltered under the apron of the roof, her back to the mud wall.

'Does it make any difference, now,' she laughed.

Jessie followed and Old Paul brought Mashupa to them.

'Mary, this is Mashupa. Jessie, Mashupa Ndizile, my brother.'

Mashupa could say nothing. Nothandile was there in the doorway having taken courage when she saw the women. She smiled at them and stepped aside so that they might come into her hut. Mary and Jessie went in.

'Kwenkwana,' Mashupa said, 'where is Kwenkwana?'

Old Paul put a hand on his brother's shoulder.

'The policeman wants to go back,' he said. 'Let us all unload what is in the truck and then we will tell you about it, my brother. Did you not get the letter?'

When the women disappeared into the hut, old Mbangcolo shed his blanket and he now stood naked in the rain, ready to help with the unloading. Paul remained on the lorry and they took down the sodden luggage first and then the corrugated iron and the poles, the roll of wire netting, the precious bags of cement and the few pieces of furniture. The cement and the furniture they stacked carefully against the hut wall, covering them with sheets of tin. The policeman and his companion stayed inside the cab of the truck and when the unloading was over he started the engine and reversed to face down the track again. But the earth was softer away from the track and the back wheels sank in. The constable used the gears and the engine roared but the wheels only dug themselves deeper into the mud. He put his head out of the cab and shouted to Paul.

'Get back there and push.'

The four of them went to the back of the lorry and they pushed as the driver let in the clutch again. The big wheels spun and old Mbangcolo wiped mud from his thighs and spat mud from his mouth. Paul came around to the cab again.

'She's stuck fast,' he said.

The constable got out for the first time and he pulled his collar up to keep the rain from his neck. He inspected the truck wheels. Only the one side had sunk deep into a soft spot. The other was on firmer ground.

'Get that wire,' he ordered.

'Which wire?' Paul asked.

'The netting!'

'What can you do with it?'

'Put the roll under this wheel and she'll climb out on it.'

'It's new wire. We'll need it for fencing. For building even. You can use it inside a mud wall.'

'Fetch it.'

'We'll cut branches and grass. Won't that help?'

'Fetch the wire.'

'He wants to use the wire,' Paul told the others, but the native constable came from the other side of the truck and he picked up the roll and threw it under the trapped wheel. He trod on it, forcing the end down into the mud so that the wheel would be able to grip.

'Lungile, 'Nkosi,' he said, and the constable, back in his cab, let in his clutch again. The wheels spun and steam rose from them, then the tread caught the wire and the roll was churned into the mud and the truck rose out of its trap. The native constable ran after it and as it drove away he jumped into the cab. Then the truck moved slowly down the track.

Paul and Old Paul and Mbangcolo and Mashupa stood muddy in the rain and Paul removed the twisted roll of wire from the mud.

There was thunder then and the rain came harder.

'We can wash in this,' Mashupa said. He held his one arm up and rubbed it with his hand and the mud flowed off him in the rain. The others did the same, and Old Paul removed his clothes so that, like Mbangcolo, he too stood naked. Mashupa, holding his old khaki shorts in front of him, went into the hut and he brought out his own blanket and he stood in the doorway and when his brother Paul had washed in the rain he held the blanket out.

'Cover yourself with it,' he said, but Paul would not take it.

'It is your blanket, Mashupa.'

'You have come a long way and you must again feel the comfort of a red blanket, for you are home now, Paul.'

The next morning the sun came out and Poto was up with the dawn. It had been a strange night, He and his father had built

up the fire inside and it had been warm in there with all the people. The one woman had laughed about the smoke, saying how it stung her eyes and she had complained that the floor was hard. Old Paul had quietened her. Then they had eaten meat from tins which Paul opened with a knife. And bread, and beans also from a tin, and truly it had been a feast last night. He had been given the tins at the end with something in them always, and he could use those tins. The night was not cold and inside their boxes the women had clothes of all kinds. Dresses and coats and even the men had clean dry shirts. Only the blankets were all wet, and Paul and the girl called Jessie lay there holding one another and they tried to sleep. There was not much room and the floor was crowded with all the bodies.

The air was clear at dawn and the sun rose over the sea and it was suddenly bright. The earth was wet, and large shining drops of rain water still clung to the mealie stalks. Poto walked away from the hut and out there in the cool veld he squatted, looking out to sea.

Paul lay awake in the crowded hut and Jessie's head was heavy on his left arm. She slept and breathed deeply and she was smiling. Paul smiled too and he touched her forehead. Her brow only twitched as if to rid itself of some tickling nuisance. He had seen Poto get up quietly and go out and now the light came cheerfully through the hut door.

Mashupa lay awake too, but how could it be dawn again? How could another day start just as all other days started? Surely there was a dream behind him and surely it was the spirits in new form which had come to crowd his hut. They lay around now, like sleeping people, but he knew well what strange ways the spirits chose. And which of them was Kwenkwana's spirit? Had not his spirit returned in the form of this young man who held so tightly to the beautiful girl? And Paul, his brother, was it really Paul who had come home? How often had he hoped that they would fly back, Paul and his own son. How often had he cried out to the roaring sea, 'Mazibuya!' May they come back.

He rose slowly and sat there a while beside his wife.

'Good morning,' a voice said, and Mashupa looked towards the voice. 'The rain has gone and the sun is out,' the voice said,

and there was a sudden movement and then the beautiful girl sat up. Mashupa could see her clearly now in the growing light.

'Paul?' the girl said, and Paul sat up too.

'You sleep well on a dung floor,' he said, and his arm went around her shoulders, and they lay down again and the girl turned so that her face was above the man and her arm across his chest. Mashupa looked the other way, and then he got up and limped out of the hut. His leg always worried him in the early morning and when he was outside he rubbed the feeble muscle and then walked away just as Poto had done.

'Look, there's the sea!' Mary said as she came out of the hut, and she laughed and called to the others.

They took the damp blankets and the wet clothes out into the sun and they laid them out over low bushes so that a gay patchwork surrounded Mashupa's hut. The few pieces of furniture stood outside against the hut wall and on a table Poto sat, swinging his legs. Mbangcolo came from his kraal nearby and with him came other men. There was much excitement at Mashupa's. Mashupa took his pole and line and he went down to the rocks to fish, for the excitement was now beyond him.

Because all the people had come Nothandile and Mary and Jessie prepared breakfast for them. They made putu and Mary made coffee in a billy-can. There were not enough mugs, but after breakfast the men sat around outside the hut and the few mugs of hot sweet coffee passed from hand to hand. Nothandile took the women down to the sea for Mary and Jessie had never seen it before.

'This field's no good,' someone said, scratching at the damp soil with his foot. 'It's too small, and look at the dongas starting down there! What about down at the river?'

'That is all Shixini's land,' Kobolo said, for he too had heard of the excitement and he had come to find out for himself what it was all about.

'Who's Shixini?' Paul asked.

The others looked at one another and smiled. Old Paul sat in a place of honour on a pocket of cement for it was he who would have to decide about the land and about the huts for he was the

oldest of the Ndiziles. He had asked Mashupa to stay, but his brother had only stared at him and then limped away.

'Do you not remember?' Old Paul asked of his son. 'He is the Headman. Whatever we decide we will have to put to him before we can build.'

'We must go and see him then.'

'Wait,' Old Paul said, for he knew that the man Mbangcolo and the others had come to sit there with them in the morning sun and to help work out some plan for them. There was something good about this neighbourliness and about the serious and helpful faces around them. This was how it used to be long ago, Old Paul remembered. His father had sat like this, faced by a circle of men sitting on stones and the troubles of the times would be talked over and turned this way and that until something acceptable to all of them was arrived at.

'Not yet,' he said. 'First we will ask these gentlemen who have so kindly come to help us, how things have been down here and what land is untilled and what other places there are for building huts. Mbangcolo, my friend, you have lived here for many years and you know the land.'

Mbangcolo crouched there in his ochre-covered blanket and he drew in the ground with a stick. When he spoke his voice was rich and his language was pure, full of the melody and idiom of Xhosa, and he was honoured to be so approached by Ndizile.

'It is hard today,' he said. 'I have a plough and I have oxen. Long ago the oxen pulled the plough through the earth which was heavy with richness and the sods gleamed wet after they were cut. The mealies that grew on my land were strong and firm and fruitful, like the bodies of young women.'

He looked around at the others, then he stood up slowly as an old man should stand up at a meeting, and he spoke directly to Old Paul.

'But now my field is like this one,' he said. 'This one can only just keep your brother alive. He has to work for Zamakulungisa and build a small hut for children to play in. His wife has to go away to work so that there might be food. His daughter dies. His son that goes away to work does not return. He himself is worn dry and afraid. His log worries him even as he sits on a rock high

above the sea. Here is hopelessness, Ndizile. Here is a sick land and sorrow in the future. Over there is my land. You can see the hut and the small kraal outside. There too is hopelessness.'

He turned and held out his hand to point across the valley but the men did not look that way. They knew Mbangcolo's land just as they knew Mashupa's land. They murmured an assent. 'Here is hopelessness.'

'You have brought back a wife, Ndizile, and a son and his wife. And the first thing that you are told is that this field is no good. This is sad, but it is as it should be. You should be told. And now that you have been told you must go to Shixini and you must get land by the river for your family. I, Mbangcolo, will lend my plough and my oxen and we shall plough that land and I will share a little in the good things that it will bring.'

Only Kobolo had land by the river. He did not rise to his feet, but he spoke from where he sat and his voice was somehow unkind.

'There is no empty land by the river,' he said. 'It is all ploughed, right down to the bank. Shixini has all that land. He has given me one field and it is a good field, but there are no more, and there is no place to build a hut. You cannot build a hut on good land. You could grow pumpkins on the floor!'

Kobolo laughed but the others turned to Old Paul.

'We must have land,' Old Paul said. 'My son has been sent back to live here because it is said that this is his home. He must have land, is that not so, my son?'

Paul had followed the discussion. He liked the old man Mbangcolo. He was a sincere old man in a red blanket who smiled when he spoke of the sharing of crops.

'I suppose we must have land,' he said. 'How else can we live?'

'Shixini likes brandy,' Kobolo offered, and the others stared at him. 'He has a permit for one gallon a month, and he drinks it all on a Friday, a Saturday and a Sunday. Sometimes he asks his friends. His wives make beer on those days.'

Nothandile, Mary and Jessie could be seen approaching along the path that led up from the sea. Mary was in front and she waved when the men looked towards her! She stopped on the

steep path to rest and she turned to face the sea again. The others stopped behind her on the narrow path.

'It is big and it is beautiful,' Mary said and she put her hand on Jessie's shoulder. 'You will be happy here.'

Then she turned again, and leaning forwards, pressing on her knees with her hands, she made her way towards Mashupa's hut.

She was breathing heavily when she arrived and the climb had made her heart pump wildly. She stood in front of the men and her chest heaved. Old Paul got up from his cement pocket and he came to her.

'It is a steep climb,' he said.

'Yes, it is steep, and who would farm on top of a hill? Down there by the river is the place.'

She pointed down into the valley and Old Paul nodded and took Mary's arm.

'We have been talking about that, my dear. We will have to see the Headman.'

14

Paul crouched in the smooth sand that formed the bank of the river mouth and filled his tins. Jessie worked further upstream gathering small pebbles. When Paul's tins were full he picked them up and carried them to the place where Jessie worked.

'It's clean sand,' Paul said.

'And these pebbles are worn round and smooth. Will they do?'

'They'll do.'

'It's hot!'

Paul put his tins down.

'Let's have a swim,' he said. 'Here in the river mouth. There's no one about.'

'Shall we?'

'Come on.'

Jessie wore only a blouse and a skirt and Paul put his arms around her and held her tightly, then he pulled the blouse out but Jessie would not raise her arms.

'Wait. Sure there's no one?'

'This is Pondoland, Jessie.'

Paul swept his arm around and it was true that it was a lonely spot. The river turned just before it reached the sea and its banks were high. The path down which they had come led up the one bank and on to a higher plateau. Towards the sea there were only rocks and the beach.

Jessie raised her arms and Paul pulled off the blouse. He took off his own shirt and then his trousers. They both had no shoes and soon Jessie had wriggled out of her skirt. Paul took her hand.

'Shall we run in,' he said, but Jessie only stood there, the sun warm and pleasurable on her naked body.

'It's a lovely river.'

She let go of Paul's hand and picked up her clothes.

'Let's go back to where you were. There the sand is soft and we can swim in the sea.'

Paul picked up his own clothes and together they walked along the river bank down to the sea.

'It seems all right, doesn't it, to be walking together naked,' Jessie said.

'Does it?'

'Nakedness is so normal down here. Remember those women gathering shell-fish?'

'They were all old kehlakazis, withered and thin.'

'They are thin because they don't get enough to eat and they have too many children. That dries them up and they wither.'

When they reached the clean white sand Jessie dropped her clothes and turned to Paul.

'But us, naked on the beach, there's something different about that.'

She was so dear and desirable as she stood there. He knew her body now and knew the heavy smooth weight of her breasts, the wet clasp of her thighs. The feel of the sun on his own body and the feel of soft sand beneath his feet he did not know; they were things new and undiscovered. As he looked at her he shivered a

little and he stepped up to her and kissed her, his hand running up and down her warm back.

'Put your clothes with mine,' she whispered into his ear, and he did as he was told and she lay down on them.

Their bodies were hot together and only a seagull flew curious above them as Jessie laughed. It was a cheerful, clear laugh and it rang out loud from the lonely beach and the seagull squawked and soared away.

'How funny we must look to that seagull, moving excited together on the beach, so that my hips dig holes for themselves in the sand!'

'You are lying on my shirt.'

'I can feel the sand beneath it, warm and fine.'

'Are you comfortable?'

'Yes.'

They closed their eyes and, drugged by the sun and their pleasure, they fell asleep. The seagull flew out to more promising places and white crabs raised themselves from the sand as the waves receded. The sun grew hotter and the cool sound of the sea blended into dreams.

Jessie awoke and colours flashed in front of her. She moved her arm and laid it across her eyes.

'We'll sleep all morning,' he mumbled.

She lay still for a while and sleep tugged luxuriously at her once again. Her head lolled to one side. Her limbs were warm and heavy and the heat drugged her. Paul lay still and then his body twitched and he moved and lay with his arm across her. She felt the weight of his arm on her breasts and she caught his hand and squeezed it.

'Come on,' she said in a whisper. 'Up!'

But neither of them moved.

There was a house to build and a home to make and a piece of land to till. Mary and Old Paul would surely be working. The two tracts of land on the river bank were good fields. The river curved there and the land was on the inside of the curve. The sites for the two huts lay away from the river on higher ground, and they had been levelled and the corner poles of the second hut already stood firm in concrete.

Jessie moved Paul's arm and slowly sat up. She hugged her knees to her and rested her chin on her hands. She looked out to where the river joined the sea. They had come a long way, a long way back.

She picked up a handful of sand and let it trickle through her fingers on to Paul's naked thigh.

'Come on,' she said. 'Up.'

He roused himself and rolled over on to his back.

'Can we make a life of it?' he asked suddenly.

'Yes. Up.'

They stood up and held one another for a moment. Then they walked quietly down to the sea and cooled their bodies in the waves.

They had left their tins upstream and they came back to them and carried them up to the place where the huts were to be built.

'Can you carry it?' Paul asked as Jessie lifted her tin by its wire handle.

'It would be help if I could carry it on my head!'

'Let's try.'

Jessie had not put on her blouse again and she was still wet from the sea. Paul wrapped his shirt into a pad for her head.

'Use this for your head.'

He lifted up the tin while Jessie arranged the pad carefully.

'Nothandle does it so easily! Even with a tin full of water.'

The tin wobbled and Jessie's neck seemed to weave weakly beneath it.

'Keep it still,' she said, and Paul steadied the tin.

'It makes for a good straight back,' Paul said and stepped away, admiring her.

Jessie raised her hands to steady the tin on her head and she began to laugh.

'If you laugh it will wobble and fall. You are beautiful. A Zulu maid back from the water hole! Bare-breasted and beautiful.'

'Come on, let's go,' she said, turning successfully with the heavy tin still balanced.

Paul walked behind her carrying his own tins and he could see the muscles of her neck straining. She was doing well.

'It might be innate,' he said from behind her.

'Shut up!'

'Let's get up to that higher path.'

They moved away from the river bank and when they were on the higher path they could see two people walking towards them. They were fishermen with their rods and they would be going down to the rocks.

'They're Europeans,' Jessie said.

'So?'

'I'm half-naked! Give me my blouse.'

Paul stopped and removed the tin from Jessie's head. He held the blouse for her and she put it on.

'It's not much, but it's something.'

'They wouldn't be surprised to see you naked. Not in Pondoland. Remember the oyster gatherers?'

The two Europeans approached and Paul saw that it was the trader and his assistant. They must have left their jeep somewhere on the sled track.

'It's Zamakulungisa,' he said.

'He often goes fishing, doesn't he?'

'Yes, he is fond of the sea.'

Zamakulungisa came up to them and he laughed when he saw the tins.

'Morning, you oyster gatherers! Got any crayfish, sixpence each!'

'No bait, 'Nkosi,' Paul joked. 'Only stones and sand for concrete.'

'You're coming on up there with the second hut. My man can give you a hand again when it comes to carpentry.'

'Thank you.'

The man with him, his shop assistant, carried the rods and was dark and unshaven. His clothes were ragged and he stared at Jessie. Jessie closed the neck of her blouse, but her body was damp still and the cloth clung to her. Quickly she sat down on her tin and held her arms crossed in front of her and the man grinned.

'Sure I'll give them a hand again,' he said.

'Well, Ndizile. Just let me know and I'll send Stoffel along.'

'Thank you. We may do that.'

Zamakulungisa walked on but Stoffel bent down and slipped a hand into the tin on which Jessie sat. His wrist pressed against her thigh and he removed a handful of stones.

'You mustn't use big stones,' he said.

He dropped the stones back into the tin and then he followed his employer.

Jessie watched him go and Paul came to her side and she put an arm around his legs.

'I hate that man!' she whispered, then she stood up and picked up her tin. This time she carried it by the handle.

At the site for the new huts Old Paul worked with Mary. Poto was there too and he attacked a mound of sand and stone with a heavy shovel. He worked eagerly but the shovel was too heavy. Old Paul took over and put him on to the lighter task of chipping the larger stones with a hammer. Concrete was necessary for setting the corner poles but who would think how difficult it was to get crushed stone in the middle of Pondoland! Sea sand there was, but to pick each stone from the river bed or to chip those softer rocks that had come from the levelling of the site, instead of shovelling from a pile of stones that were delivered in a truck! This was building in the bush!

'No wonder the people use mud!' Old Paul said, and Mary, who had insisted on the wood and iron, looked across at the one completed hut.

'They may look like lavatories in a township,' she said. 'Tin shanties on the banks of a beautiful river, but they are not mud!'

Old Paul saw Jessie and Paul approaching along the path that came up from the river and he leant on his shovel for a moment, wondering how his son would be once the excitement of these first days had worn thin. Would his love for the girl grow and would that love calm the bitterness, so that one day he could go back to the world he knew and raise a firmer, less strident voice for his own people? Or would he grow more bitter as the new love grew stale, and would he shout and scream again and would the paper still pay him for what he wrote? Much depended upon

the woman herself, Old Paul knew, and much depended upon keeping the young man busy, on such tasks as building a hut, for instance.

15

They were two simple wood and iron sheds, incongruous on the banks of the Kuphela. They were shelter and home for the two couples. Mary and Jessie made a garden between the huts and already carrots grew there, and small tomato plants and pumpkins. The land down at the river had been planted for them the previous year by one of Shixini's men. Two-thirds of the crop was Shixini's, as well as a bottle of brandy each month from Old Paul's new permit. It was a good enough arrangement and Old Paul thought eagerly of the next season when they would buy fertilizer and good seed and the land would be made to produce, better than it had ever done before. He sat on a straight-backed chair outside his house and inside Mary was busying herself with breakfast. A fire burnt cheerfully in a perforated tin and on the wire grid lay six yellow mealies, popping black and tasty. Soon Mary would bring out the pot of porridge and place it on the fire and the morning meal would be a pleasant one.

It was cooler now as June approached and down in the river mullet jumped. Poto had brought some firewood from the beach.

'Thank you, Poto. You are a great help,' Old Paul said, and Poto sat down on the ground near his uncle's chair. 'And how is your father today? We have not seen him this week.'

'He does not like to come here.'

'We sent half a bag of mealie-meal; is your mother making good putu?'

'Father does not eat it. He stays down at the rocks, even at night. Mother is afraid because the sea is angry at night. Last night father did not come home.'

'We must do something about that. He shouldn't stay down at the rocks. Will you eat with us, Poto? There are mealies.'

'Thank you.'

Jessie and Paul walked across from their own hut. Paul carried a chair for her and this he put down so that she might sit next to his father. Poto got up and he fetched a box for Paul from behind the hut.

'Thank you, Poto. You know when it's breakfast time!'

Mary came out with the pot and she stirred the thick porridge with a wooden spoon.

'Tonight it will be putu again. Beans are short.'

'Ours are finished,' Jessie said.

'Ai! This farmer's life! When are you men going to earn us some money? How do these other people live?'

'We had a good crop.'

'A good crop, he says! Mealies, bags of mealies, is that a good crop?'

Mary had watched Old Paul sink happily back into the soil. She watched him cover himself in a blanket and sit in the sun and for a while it pleased her. He was happy, the old man, but she herself soon grew restless. And if she were restless how must it be with the younger ones? Jessie was calm, she was pregnant and that was good. There had been talk of work at the clinic but there was too much to do setting up a home and she could not think of it until the huts were built. And now that they were built she had other thoughts to keep her quiet, and to calm the restlessness. But Paul, the young man from the University, the writer of articles in the paper! Had he too shot sudden roots into the Pondo soil?

'I don't see you with your pen and paper, Paul. Where are the guineas?'

She held her wooden spoon in her hand and flashed it high in the air like a magic wand.

'Guineas! Not just pounds or shillings or rands, but guineas! Ha!'

'I have something nearly finished,' Paul said. 'I will send it soon.'

'Ai, that's better; how many guineas will the something bring?'

'Oh, I don't know. It's about these many years. About you and

Mofolokohlo and Sweet Meadows. And now about Pondoland and the river and the fields and the hills.'

'Who will want to read all that?'

'It will be a book, mother.'

'A book! Ai, but now what do we have amongst us! A book indeed!'

'Come, let us have some coffee,' Old Paul said.

Old Paul enjoyed coffee these days and he liked to sit outside his new hut on a varnished wooden chair and sip from a large china mug which Mary kept specially for him. He liked to watch the birds scratching in the reaped field and he liked to think of the bags of mealies at the back, carefully covered by sheets of corrugated iron. They would have to build a silo for next year and they would have to grow beans if they wanted them.

Mary gave him his big cup and he thanked her, remembering that it was she who had said that they should build a silo.

'Next year we will plant beans and pumpkins between the mealies,' he said. 'We are still learning this farming, Mary.'

'Learning! At your age.'

'You will see, Mary. When Paul has finished working on his book and when Jessie has had her child this will be a real farm, a rich farm by the river. Not so, Paul?'

'It was a good crop. The best for many years, Kobolo tells me.'

'Ah yes, Kobolo. He is a strange one that. Has he never been out to work?'

'He is a good friend of Shixini's and he also has a field by the river. He doesn't need to go out to work.'

'That's what a man must find! A place where he doesn't need to work!'

'Listen to him!' Mary shouted from her position by the fire. She held up the porridge spoon again. 'Listen to him. The Pondo fever runs hot through his blood. A place where one does not need to work! Aaai! But you men!'

'I'm retired, Mary,' Old Paul laughed. 'I've retired from work!'

Mary plunged the wooden spoon into the pot and stirred angrily.

'Let us see some of those guineas,' she mumbled. 'And let me see you grow beans and build a silo for next year.'

There was a shout from across the river. The sound carried clear through the still morning air.

'Ndizile!' the shout came, long and dragged out, floating to them from the opposite bank of the river. 'Ndizile!'

'Who is that?' Mary asked, turning towards the sound.

'It is Kobolo, I think.'

'Izapha! Kauleza!'

'I think it's me he wants,' Paul said.

'Tell him you haven't had breakfast!'

Paul got up from his box and walked a few yards away and he cupped his hands and answered.

'Come on up. Cross at the mouth,' he called.

'Hi. Izapha! Ngoku! Sizodibana ngaphansi!'

The man started to walk along the river bank towards the mouth and Paul turned back to the others.

'It's Kobolo. He wants me to meet him down at the mouth.'

'He was on the beach early,' Poto said. 'Can I come with you?'

'No, Poto. You stay here and have some breakfast.'

'Take a mealie with you,' Jessie suggested and Paul took a hot yellow mealie from the fire and he blew on it as he walked away, cooling it so that he could pick the grain from the cob and munch the sweetness as he walked.

He followed the path that led down to the river and he waded across at the river mouth. The water was cold and the round stones were hard beneath his bare feet. A school of mullet cruising upstream, took fright around his legs and scattered, flashing silver across the surface. Kobolo held a hand out to him as he reached the other bank and Paul took the hand and pulled himself up.

'Molo, Kobolo. What's the news?'

'Your friends have come from the city.'

'What friends?'

'There are two of them and I took them to Mashupa's cave because they must not be seen.'

'Mashupa's cave?'

'They told me to fetch you at once. Come, we must hurry.'

Kobolo hurried ahead leading Paul away from the river, up a

steep path that rose to the top of the hill and then along the ridge. The sea was a deep blue and no wind disturbed the surface. A heavy swell was running and the smooth line of each wave broke far out to sea so that a broad white strip followed the coast. Paul stopped and he turned towards the sea. It was a beautiful place. There had been some peace these last few months. Who was it now come to disturb the peace? Friends from the city. Did he really have any friends in the city? And Kobolo? Kobolo the red-blanketed messenger, who hurried about his business like some excited crab on the beach.

With his teeth Paul tore mealies from the cob and there was something clean and satisfying about the taste of them.

Kobolo stopped at the spot where the footpath entered the bushes that clung to the shore slope and he called to Paul.

'Izapha! Come here!'

Paul walked slowly towards him and Kobolo waited impatiently.

'We must hurry,' he said again as Paul came up.

'Why, Kobolo? Why hurry?'

'You don't know the path through the bush.'

'I'll follow you.'

'Come then.'

'Wait a bit, before we disappear into the bushes, have a look at the sea. It is beautiful today.'

'They are waiting for you.'

'Who are they, Kobolo? Who are they that should disturb our peaceful morning?'

Kobolo came close to him and he held his arm and Paul could smell the pungent smokiness of the Pondo's blanket.

'While you lie in your new hut with your new wife, men are working here in Pondoland. We are working for tomorrow and you do not even know what happens right here under your armpit.'

'Tell me, Kobolo, tell me what I have missed.'

Kobolo looked back towards the bushes and he whispered this time.

'At night they come, from the sea, and they carry guns and even you do not know!'

'Don't they carry people off, and don't they rise straight out of the sea and walk across it till they reach the beach!'

'They don't walk! They come in boats and they come silently at night.'

'I see, Kobolo. They don't walk.'

'Come, down this path.'

'Lead on, I'll follow my nose.'

'Uthini?'

'Asihambe. Let us go.'

Kobolo hurried down the steep twisting path swinging skilfully around trees, his hard bare feet sure on the roots and rocks. The path came out of the bush right close to the sea and Paul could see the grey line of it continuing over black boulders. Kobolo waited for him a while then he hurried on, springing over the boulders. He waited again at a spot where the land had been undercut and had fallen crazily into the sea.

'This is Inhlabamkhosi.'

'The warning?'

'Inhlabamkhosi. The warning that the land can fall.'

Kobolo hurried through a narrow gap between the fallen mass and the cliff from which it had detached itself. The opening was not an easy one to see.

The grey path had disappeared now, the dust from the bush path soon wore off bare feet, and there were no signs of a track across the rocks.

Once through the gap Kobolo pointed up towards a green patch of grass that clung to the cliff.

'Just there, around the ledge where that grass is.'

'What do you mean?'

'They are waiting there. Walk over the round rocks then you will see how you can get up to the grass.'

'What's up there?'

'Mashupa's cave. And your friends too. Now go.'

'Aren't you coming?'

'I was told only to fetch you. It is not good for too many of us to use the cave by daylight.'

The cave that Mashupa had found lay deep in the cliff and from

a damp crevice in one wall fresh water trickled. A billy-can caught the trickle and the can was full to the brim.

'Drinking water laid on,' Ralitapula said. 'That's something.'

In the entrance to the cave coarse grass grew, but inside, the shale was dry and Mashupa had cleared a small place for himself. The ashes from his fire, fish scales, the horny heads of crayfish, some dry grass that was his bed, showed the others where he lived.

Shakes Masindile went further in. He stumbled on the shale, cursed and lit a match.

'Christ,' he shouted, 'it goes a long way in!'

His voice boomed in the darkness and rock pigeons swooped out into the sunlight.

'Have you ever been right in?' Ralitapula asked, but Mashupa held up his hands and hunched his shoulders so that his head sank low as if he would withdraw into a shell.

'Nkosi! I stay here. I catch fish and I cook them and I listen to the sea.'

'We may be joining you.'

'Nkosi.'

'We may stay for a while. You can keep your spot, we'll out some space further in. Where does the smoke go?'

'Intoni, 'Nkosi?'

'The smoke from your fire, where does it go?'

'It goes up and out, 'Nkosi.' Mashupa swept his arms upwards and then pointed out towards the sea. 'Where else could smoke go?'

'We will share your fireplace.'

'There is much wood on the rocks, 'Nkosi. A fire is nothing. See, I have a store.'

A pile of salt-white driftwood stood against the cave wall and on top of it lay some fine twigs and dry grass.

'Do many people know of this place?'

'No, 'Nkosi. Only a few fishermen.'

'And Paul Ndizile, does he know?'

'Paul?'

'Your brother's son.'

'Hau, 'Nkosi, Paul! He does not come here.'

'And Kwenkwana, did he know of it?'

'Kwenkwana? Who told you of Kwenkwana?'

'I knew him, old man! He worked for me in Johannesburg.'

'For you? In Johannesburg. Kwenkwana? I do not understand.'

'No, you wouldn't understand. But before he left did he know of it?'

Did Kwenkwana know the cave? How did it matter if a man who was dead knew of a hidden cave? Why did this man come to haunt him with talk of the dead?

'He knew it,' Mashupa whispered. 'We came here together and we fished in those gullies. Poto too, when he was old enough, we all came to fish in the sea.'

Mashupa shuffled out of the cave and he stood in the entrance, on the damp grass that grew there, and looked out to sea.

Kwenkwana and Johannesburg and these men come to his own cave, his new home, come to breathe the air of his sea and share his fire.

From the cliff path Paul saw Mashupa and he stopped a while where the path turned and also looked out to sea. Below him the waves thumped heavily into a narrow gully and the rocks glistened as the water receded. There were clusters of mussels on the rocks and there would be bream in the gully and crayfish and crabs. Beyond stretched the Indian Ocean, blue and forever. Mashupa had found a quiet place right on the edge of the land.

'Good morning, Mashupa!' he shouted. 'This is a fine place you have found!'

Mashupa turned towards the voice and he saw Paul below him.

'Your friends are here, come up,' he called.

'Is there light in there to see them by?'

'There is no need for a light.'

'It must be dark in there, dark after the brightness of the sea.'

'The sun shines on the walls and a man can see.'

'Who comes out of the sea at night, Mashupa? What disturbs you at night?'

'Come! Come up!'

Paul climbed the last few yards to the mouth of the cave and Ralitapula, hearing the calling voices, came out into the sun. He wore a red shirt and his one hand was buried deep in the pocket

of his denim trousers. His short pointed beard was the same and he stood just in the entrance of the cave and he held out his good hand, as Paul stepped on to the grassy threshold.

'Welcome, Paul,' he said, and Paul stared at him thinking of that bad hand working on a small bone. 'We've come, Paul, unheralded perhaps, but we've come.'

'It's you, Rali.'

'Not only me. Remember *Tom-tom's* best reporter?'

'You and Shakes Masindile.'

'The same, Paul.'

'Why do you hide in a cave?'

'There is much to tell you, Paul. About us and about others.'

'And what do you want with me, Lereng?'

'Lereng? Lereng? What's happened, Paul?'

'Why did you send Kobolo to call me?'

'Come in, Paul.'

Shakes's voice boomed again from inside the cave.

'Hey, Rali, want to go into the fertilizer business?'

He appeared out of the darkness stamping a white dust from his shoes.

'Every bird in Pondoland likes this place. Every winged thing, hey, Mashupa?'

He stood there in the entrance, his eyes blinking in the brightness and then he saw Paul.

'Ah, Paul. The other flying thing!'

Shakes came up to him and held out a hand. Paul took it and Shakes put an arm around his shoulder.

'How's it, Paul, boy? You look just fine. Just fine!'

'Come in,' Ralitapula said again.

'We didn't expect you so soon. Come in. We can talk in there with the sound of the sea in our ears. How will that be, Paul?'

'Why did you come to Pondoland? You know that I am watched. You know that I have to report regularly to the police.'

'Come in, we'll tell you.'

Paul followed them into the cave and Shakes pulled a smooth log from Mashupa's pile.

'Furniture's not up to standard,' he said.

'Sit down, Paul.'

They sat down around Mashupa's dying fire and Mashupa quickly fed it with more wood.

'We don't need a fire,' Paul said.

'Mashupa will get us some breakfast, not so, Mashupa?'

'How did you find this place?'

Mashupa blew into the fire and the flames rose from the ashes and caught the dry wood.

'Right on your doorstep and you don't know what's going on. That's good. That's very good.'

'I am watched. Why did you come here?'

'Ah yes, Paul. You are watched,' Shakes said. 'You have to report regularly to the police, and as long as you do so everything is just fine, isn't it? You settle down nicely with your lovely wife and you grow mealies. All those silly things have gone out of your head and you're happy on the land again! That's why we came here, to share this new bliss with you, man!'

Mashupa took his long pole from its place against the cave wall and he walked away from the cave and down to the rocks. He would catch them a damba and they could taste the dark-veined juiciness of the fish's flesh and perhaps it would not be so bad after all to have some friends.

'Catch us some breakfast,' Shakes shouted and Mashupa waved his pole.

'He's just about gone, that old man, Uncle Mashupa, the beachcomber! Come, let's watch this.'

Shakes got up and went out to the grass patch but Paul did not move. He sat there on his log and he stared at the lively flames of the fire.

'How has it been?' Ralitapula asked.

'It has been peaceful.'

'Christ, Paul, after the way they have messed you around!'

'I don't understand it quite, but it has been peaceful.'

'What the hell do you do?'

'I write.'

'Jeez. That got you far before! We need action, Paul, not words!'

Mashupa did not go far and Shakes watched him knock coral from a rock and take out a long hairy worm from the coral and

put the worm on the hook. He grinned at Shakes from the edge of the gully and held up a hand, muttering something to himself.

'Just wait, you city gentlemen. I'll show you where the fish live.'

He swung his long pole over the gully and the baited hook sank beneath the white foam. He stood there holding the tip of the pole just above the water.

'Ehe! Ehe!' Mashupa shouted and the long pole bent as he leant back and swung a struggling damba on to the rocks. He pounced on it and with a stone he beat it to death. He thrust his fingers into the fish's gills and held it up for Shakes to see.

'It's too easy,' Shakes shouted. 'Bring it up, we'll cook him.'

Mashupa gutted the fish and washed it in a pool. He brought it up to the cave and he made a fire with the brushwood and he cooked the damba on the coals.

'Reminds me of that day at school,' Ralitapula said, as they sat there in the cave. 'Remember that big fat eel?'

'That was the beginning.'

'Once again, there is a new beginning.'

Mashupa passed a piece of juicy flesh and Ralitapula took it and nibbled at it.

'Not as greasy as an eel,' he said.

'Very good, Mashupa. Fish every morning for breakfast.'

Shakes took another piece and popped it hot and tasty into his mouth.

'Rali's right, Paul, new things are happening,' he said.

'Tell me.'

'Me or you, Rali?'

'You, Shakes.'

'O.K. Where do I start? Ja, at the beginning. I know. I know. We got into some sort of trouble, Paul, with the police.'

That girl! Paul realized suddenly. They found out! He turned to Ralitapula, his voice intense.

'They found out about that girl?'

'She's dead and buried,' Ralitapula snapped.

'Girls?' Shakes said. 'What's it got to do with girls?'

'Carry on!'

'O.K., O.K.' Shakes shrugged his shoulders and reached for another piece of fish. 'Well,' he continued, 'Ralitapula was right

in with the boys. You know how it is Paul, deep underground.' His hand dipped low and he grinned at Paul. 'Like rats, Paul, in dark places. Anyhow, they came to chase us out and we had to run for it. They think we're in Capetown, Paul, how's that? They think we're in Capetown and we're here in a cave in Pondoland! Man, but the system!'

'What system this time, Shakes?'

'Ja. What system. You don't see the newspapers do you, Paul?'

'Not often.'

'How can you do it, man?' Ralitapula interrupted. 'How can you just bury yourself here? How can you just crawl away and forget everything?'

Shakes held up a hand.

'Easy, Rali, easy. See, Paul, you've been talked about up there. They had your name in the papers about America and the hope and the rest. Then came the no-passport back-to-Pondoland business and other papers picked it up. Some English papers and American too. They all wanted to know about Paul Ndizile who's sitting in a hut in Pondoland. You'll have reporters coming to you yet, my boy. That's why they won't look for us here. Not here, so close to the cause of all the fuss. They'll only watch you!'

'I saw some of the things that were written,' Paul said. 'Zamakulungisa showed me.'

'Who's he?'

'He's a trader. A good man.'

Mashupa offered more fish and they each took some. They talked on, unaware of the old man.

'Anyhow, Paul, you're quite a figure now, man. You're news. Exiled journalist. Victim of apartheid, the lot. So they're going to use you, Paul. They're going to use you, my boy. You never know, you may end up as the first President of free Pondoland! How's that sound?'

'That's it,' Ralitapula interrupted again. 'You're the free Africa! You're the man to lead the people. You're the future, Paul. The place needs someone like you!'

The eagerness in Ralitapula's voice was bewildering and the flashing eyes brought sudden memory of past madness. The limp

arm and the awful smell of blood, the knuckle bone rubbed in cherishing fingers.

'What happened to you, Rali?' Paul whispered. 'Where did you go? What happened to all the learning and the hope and the joy? What happened?'

He reached out a hand and grabbed Rali's arm. It was his bad arm and he felt the bone hard beneath the weak flesh.

'You've been writing, for sure,' Ralitapula said. 'You get like this when you've been writing.'

'I've been trying to understand. I've been trying to see where you have gone and I've been trying to find a way for myself. Tell me, what madness is this?'

'Wait a bit, wait a bit,' Shakes said. 'No one's mad around here. Let me tell you, Paul.'

Shakes made himself more comfortable, cross-legged on the straw and he held out a hand and he counted off his points on greasy fingers.

'One, this is a Bantustan. This is one of the places where we can run our own show. Independence, live and let live, and all that. Two, we've got a coastline and the sea outside that coastline stretches way to the East. Three, we've got a little pull, Rali and I, we've got a little pull, and they trust us.'

Shakes winked at Ralitapula and chuckled to himself.

'Four, we've got money coming in. We can help you if you help us. Good money, Paul, for you and Jessie and your old man. No need to live on mealies and fish. And five. Five, well, you're just the fellow!'

Shakes held up a thumb and poked it into the air.

'You're just the man. Clever, young, your picture will look good in the papers. The African people behind you. A man of the people. That's it, Paul. You're a man of the people. Black, educated, maltreated by the crazy system. What have any of the others got on you? Tshombe, Kaunda, Kenyatta!'

Shakes poked his finger up into the air with each name, forcing the thumb higher.

'Malipakaniswa upondo lwayo! May her horn rise high!' he cried, his arm stretched straight above his head. 'What's mad about that?'

Paul had let go of Rali's arm but the feel of the thin flesh and the memory of the ugly wound haunted him. He had heard Shakes and he had heard the points counted confidently. For a moment he felt a strange affinity for both of these two men. For Ralitapula, the old potato, with his useless arm, and Shakes Masindile, the best reporter on *Tom-tom*. An unbidden excitement crept into him and it curled deliciously in his stomach and he felt its warmth. He smiled, a thin expectant smile, and his hands clutched at the dry grass on which he was sitting.

'Who are the others?' he asked and his voice was quiet. 'Are they the future? Are they Africa? Is yours the right way?'

'What other way?' Ralitapula said. 'Every step you've taken has been blocked! You held out a hand and it was brushed aside. Where do you turn now, Paul?'

'To Africa, Paul. You're the future, boy, and we need you!'

Shakes reached for the roasted head of the damba, picked out an eye with his finger and ate it.

16

Jessie noticed the restlessness in Paul and she saw that the pages stayed undisturbed in the wooden box under the table. He did not speak to her about it, and she watched him as he worried, thinking that she was not much comfort to him

'Have you arranged with Zamakulungisa?' she asked one morning. 'About getting to the hospital?'

'No. I'll see him today. I'll ask him.'

'Today?'

'I am going with Kobolo.'

'Yes, of course. Kobolo. You spend so much time with him.'

'Kobolo is a friend.'

'He's not even clean.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'He isn't clean, that's all. His blanket is filthy and he's a savage.'

'He's a Pondo like me.'

'Yes, dear.'

'He's an African too. What's wrong with that?'

'Nothing dear.'

'Leave Kobolo alone.'

'Yes, dear.'

They lay on their separate beds and the silence was heavy in the small square hut.

'I'll talk to Zamakulungisa today for sure,' he said after a while.

'Thank you,' Jessie said. 'I may be silly, but I would like to have it in a hospital.'

'If you want to you shall.'

'Thank you. Most other women here don't worry. Perhaps I'm silly.'

'You're a nurse. You know what these things mean.'

She knew these things and she was a nurse and the women groaning in dark huts delivering on an ochre blanket, taboo to all men, were strange animals to her. They smeared themselves with the juice of plants and they buried the afterbirth in a corner of a mealie field so that the fire'd would produce.

'Perhaps it's because of my own mother,' Jessie said.

'Don't worry, Jessie.'

'I would prefer a doctor and a maternity ward and a clean bed.'

'I'll talk to Zamakulungisa. You could stay a few nights in his servants' quarters and then he could take you to Umtata in his car.'

'Do you think he will?'

'I'm sure he will. He's a good man.'

The two beds were separated in the small hut and Paul moved from his and Jessie made room for him. He slipped an arm under her and held her to him.

'You've been so far away,' she whispered.

'I'm sorry.'

'What is it? Can't you tell me?'

'There is nothing to tell really.'

'Yes there is.'

Paul stroked her back and he could feel the firm pressure of her against his stomach, feel the strange beloved change in shape.

'We can't get very close, even if we wanted to.'

'Don't be cruel!'

'He kicks sometimes, doesn't he?'

'Especially in the morning.'

Paul stopped his stroking and he held her tightly to him.

'They have some crazy scheme,' he said, and Jessie knew that she was going to hear of it. 'It is said that they're running guns. They bring them in at night from the beach.'

'Who, Paul, and what for?'

'It's quite a big organization.'

'What can Kobolo run?'

'Who mentioned Kobolo?'

'Well, who then, darling, who are they?'

Paul's hand lay firm on her buttocks, pressing her to him. Who are they, who are the men who wait hidden somewhere in the background? Who are those leaders who could come out into the light and show themselves? Who are they who would want to use him?

'I don't know who they are,' Paul said.

'Perhaps it's all just talk. To explain the soldiers.'

'The troops have come to keep the peace. There was shooting and they burnt some huts in Bilana.'

'So the soldiers came to stop them?'

'That's it.'

'Do you think they'll come here?'

'They may, and there could be shooting.'

Zamakulungisa, the man who tries to put things right, lived alone at his trading store and the mood of the people was disturbing. He awoke early and he walked away from the store. He followed the footpath that led down towards the Kuphela and when he stood on the top of a rise he could see the mist line of the river below him. The mist clung close to the water, a long twisting cloud stretching right to the coast, Where it met the sea the cloud broke up and Zamakulungisa thought of Sunday and

of fishing down there at the river mouth. Quiet and restful when the store was closed. It was a good store, a popular one, and Pondos came from miles around to shop there. The prices were right and credit was available. He bought wool and tobacco too and mealies after reaping. He stored the mealies in metal tanks and sold them back to the Pondos in lean times. Most years the store was not enough and he had to bring in bags of mealies grown by farmers in the Orange Free State. They were bigger, whiter mealies and they kept the Pondos alive.

To his right, nearer the coast, Zamakulungisa could see the hills that were turning to sand. One of them was white-topped already, and another was scarred by the rain, and barren. On that hill the old limping man grew his mealies and Zamakulungisa wondered how the old man was faring now that his brother had returned. The brother was a fine old man and the son was confused. Perhaps together the family would look after those good fields on the river bank and if the floods didn't tear away their work the Ndiziles might see better days. For sure, such beautiful land should not be so badly farmed and hills should not turn to sand.

A Pondo, wrapped warmly in his blanket, rode towards him and his pony stepped sure-footed up the steep path, his forelegs straining. The man pulled up when he reached the top of the rise and he raised his stick in welcome.

'Molo, 'Nkosi,' he said.

'Molo, Shixini.'

'How is it this morning, 'Nkosi?'

'No, I am still here.'

'And me too.'

Shixini turned in his saddle and looked towards the sea.

'It is a beautiful land,' he said.

'In the morning the air is clear and one wishes to take deep breaths.'

'What do you see from here, 'Nkosi?'

'The same as you, Shixini. The sea and the sky and the land and the mist over the river. Even smoke from the morning fires and dew on the grass.'

'You have stayed so long here that now you talk like a Pondo!

But what else, 'Nkosi, what do you see there inside the huts, what do you see of my people?'

'That they are poor, Shixini, that they are living now as they lived many hundreds of years ago.'

'And whose fault is it, 'Nkosi?'

'Theirs, Shixini. While others searched and worked and lifted themselves up they clung to one piece of land until it died. Like that scoured patch you see over there on that hill. Then they moved on to find another piece of land to kill!'

'There is not enough land these days. If they had more land they would not be so poor.'

'That is it, Shixini. There is not enough land in the whole world for them. It had to happen this way, they could not go on and on moving over the land, destroying it with their ignorance, they had to stop, and stopping they had to think and work.'

'Are my people lazy?'

'They are, Shixini, but it is a happy laziness. A rest that has not been earned.'

'How do I get them to work? Here on their own land so that they will produce more?'

'Ah! there you have it, Shixini. How must people work so that they can produce more? That is the same the world over. What does the Demonstrator say? What does the man who shows, show you?'

'Only where to put fences and whose cattle to kill.'

'There are too many cattle, Shixini.'

Shixini raised his long stick and he pointed towards the land that rolled patch-tilled and unproductive behind him.

'On that land live men and cattle. Men and their money, they can live together on it or not at all. For what can a man be without cattle? Even you, when you think perhaps you will not be paid in money, even you take an ox! When you take it you do not kill it because there are too many oxen! Of course you do not kill it. The beast is money to you now, as it is always money to my people.'

'I take only good oxen, Shixini. It is the thin and unhealthy, the weak stock that must be weeded out.'

'That is worse, then, you leave the people with the thin beasts.'

Like taking the silver and leaving the pennies. On your land and eating the feed that you can buy for it, a thin beast could grow fat!’

‘Did you have a good night, Shixini? You are arguing this morning.’

‘It is just that I see you surveying my country and my people and I wonder what goes on in a white man’s head.’

‘It is good to hear you, it means that the Demonstrator must take time to explain because how can the people understand if the Headman doesn’t?’

‘He will have to sit all day in the sun, ’Nkosi, for they will never understand!’

Shixini smiled and he leaned forward and with his stick he tapped the ground near Zamakulungisa’s feet.

‘Maybe my sons will understand. They go to school and they may understand.’

Shixini sat up straight again. Zamakulungisa watched the Headman’s eyes scan his territory. This was a feudal lord of a dying order, an acquisitive hungry old man with four wives and fifty head of cattle. A Pondo, a tribal chief and a likeable scoundrel, sucking what he could from his position in the corruptible order.

‘I see you gave the Ndiziles a me good land.’

‘They have to pay me. That is how it should be. Have you seen the things they brought with them and the huts they have built?’

‘I have seen them.’

‘The young man is famous! They write about him in the newspapers.’

‘I know.’

‘And there is talk of witchcraft and of men walking from the sea.’

‘There is always talk of witchcraft. What now, Shixini, and what has it to do with Ndizile?’

Shixini turned away shaking his head, tugging at his blanket, flipping its trailing edges over his arm so that his hand was free to hold the reins.

‘It started when that old fool Mashupa Ndizile went to live in

a cave. They say he has gone white. Not like you, brown and rugged, but white like the sand near the sea.'

'You listen to this, Shixini? You, a Headman?'

'There are things happening in our land, 'Nkosi, things that you cannot understand. But I must go, we meet today at Hlabeni Bend because the soldiers are going to talk to us. Only Headmen and Chiefs have been called.'

'Listen well, Shixini. The soldiers are here to help you. To stop trouble like that they had at Bilana!'

'Bilana! There will be no trouble like that here. The people know me and they listen to me!'

The pony shook its head as Shixini tapped its side with his stick and it moved off at a lively pace, following the footpath. Soon it broke into a fast triple and Shixini waved his stick once in farewell.

Zamakulungisa stood for a while longer on the top of the hill thinking of soldiers in a troubled land and then he turned and walked back home for breakfast.

While Kobolo made his purchases at the store Paul was given tea in Zamakulungisa's office. Zamakulungisa talked freely to Paul, saying that the army was in the area, camped at Hlabeni Bend, and that he should tell the people not to be afraid. They were coming to see that there was no trouble as there had been in Bilana. There the chiefs were fighting with one another and the people were taking sides. If the people did as they were told there would be no trouble.

'I have heard of some shooting and some burning of huts,' Paul said.

'Yes, that was in Bilana. The people burnt one another's huts, and where is the sense in that? Surely, Ndizile, you can see how stupid that is?'

'It is childish,' Paul said. 'But children will fight.'

'What are they fighting for, Ndizile? Where will it get them?'

'I think they are fighting for their own chief against another appointed by the Government.'

'I met Shixini this morning. He says there will be no trouble in this area. He is the accepted chief. He is the traditional chief.'

A man came to the door and he held a roll of blue cloth.

'What is it, Stoffel?'

'This silk stuff, how much a yard?'

He brought the roll of cloth to Zamakulungisa who fingered it.

'Where's it from?'

'It's that new lot you got from Durban.'

'Let me look.'

Zamakulungisa took a file from a nail on the wall and while he paged through it Paul did not look up at the man called Stoffel and he did not greet him. Stoffel who smoked Pondo tobacco and who lived in a room at the back of Zamakulungisa's store, Stoffel with the black mistress, Stoffel who had stared at Jessie on a path.

'Your friend's buying up the shop,' Stoffel said, 'even some cloth for his girl friend. Where's he get the money?'

Paul was sitting in a wooden chair, his arm resting on Zamakulungisa's desk. He picked up a paper clip and began to twist it in his fingers.

'He has a good field down by the river,' he answered, still not turning to face the man.

'A good field, hey? That's a new one!'

Zamakulungisa found the list he wanted and he showed it to his assistant, pointing at an entry.

'There you are, Stoffel.'

He turned to Paul.

'Kobolo's been a little odd lately. Strange fellow.'

'He's a tsotsi, sir,' Stoffel said. 'I'd like to know where he gets the money.'

'He still wears his red blanket, Stoffel.'

'That doesn't mean much these days, sir.'

'You don't think so? Is there a lot of this cloth?'

'I haven't checked, sir.'

'Excuse me a moment, Ndizile,' Zamakulungisa said, and he went with his assistant into the store.

The cushion on Zamakulungisa's swivel chair was worn and papers lay in disorder on his desk. The milk jug on the tea-tray was covered by a small net, rimmed with sea-shells. One drawer of the desk was left half open and Paul could see the black butt of a revolver. It lay there on an empty money bag.

Zamakulungisa and Stoffel returned. Zamakulungisa hitched up his belt and grunted, still looking for the correct price list.

'Now he's bought a carton of cigarettes,' Stoffel said to Paul. 'Five hundred cigarettes! With cash he buys them!'

'What brand?' Paul asked derisively.

'Clever, hey!' Stoffel said as Zamakulungisa took another file from its peg. 'He's a Pondo and he should smoke icuba.'

'Perhaps he feels like a change. He's got money, and he wants to spend it.'

'Who did he pinch that from, whose place has been broken into at night? That's what I'd like to know. He doesn't get that money from mealies.'

'What do you know about money from mealies?' Paul said and his voice rose in anger. 'What do you know about the life of a man who lives from the land? What right have you to question? Kobolo has the money, so serve him. Go on! You're a shop assistant, serve him and shut up!'

'I'll cut your heart out, kaffir!' Stoffel hissed, and he stepped up to Paul, but Zamakulungisa was between them.

'Stoffel! Get back to the shop!'

Stoffel lunged at Paul and his fist swung into Paul's face before Zamakulungisa could trap his arms. It was not a well-timed blow and as Paul leant away from it, his arm on the desk scattered the tea-tray. The cups clattered to the floor and Paul managed to save only the cover from the milk jug. He snatched at it as the tray fell and then he held it, wet and ridiculous in his hand.

'Let me handle this,' Stoffel said, trying to shake himself free, but Zamakulungisa held his arms pinned.

'Stop it, you fool!'

Stoffel twisted and then he stumbled to his knees and Zamakulungisa fell with him, heavy and awkward. For a moment the two men struggled on the floor and then Stoffel had a knife in his hand, slipped from a sheath beneath his belt, and he was free. Paul sprang to his feet when he saw the knife and quickly he took the revolver from the desk drawer and faced Stoffel with it. Zamakulungisa looked up from the floor and Stoffel crouched with the knife in his hand, ready to spring,

'Stoffel! Drop that knife!'

'The kaffir's got your gun,' Stoffel said, and now he was stepping backwards out of the office. 'He'll use it, too,' he said.

'Yes, I'd use it, Stoffel. I'd use it on you.'

Paul raised the revolver, pointing it at Stoffel's chest.

Zamakulungisa struggled to his feet and he stood for a moment between the two men.

'Give me that knife,' he ordered, but Stoffel stood in the doorway now.

'You'd defend a kaffir who threatens me with a gun!'

'Give it to me.'

'A kaffir who steals your gun and points it at me, a white man.'

Paul gave the gun to Zamakulungisa who took it quickly.

'I've got the gun now. Drop that knife!' Zamakulungisa ordered and he came towards Stoffel.

Stoffel turned suddenly and ran into the shop. They heard the thud of his footsteps on the wooden floorboards and they heard his cursing as he left the shop.

'You and Kobolo better get out of here,' Zamakulungisa said. 'You brought a sled?'

'Yes, sir, we will load it and go.'

'Sorry about this, Ndizile. Something has gone wrong. There is uneasiness in the district. Stoffel lives so close to the people, he feels it.'

'It's all right, sir.'

'Do you know anything more, Ndizile? The people talk to you. Can you tell me what is going on?'

'There is nothing, sir.'

Stoffel was close to the people and he had heard, not only from women, that there were exciting things going on down at Qomoto beach. He guessed too that Kobolo was involved somehow. Kobolo and Goditi, Zokozo, Mtonjani and others, and it was Ndizile for sure who was behind it all.

He used Zamakulungisa's house phone and he spoke to a friend at the police station in Umtata. If the army was coming into the district today they might pick him up and he'd show them a few kraals in which men like Kobolo lived and perhaps it would be worth while keeping a watch on Qomoto beach.

Paul and Kobolo rode in the sled back towards the sea and as Paul sat silent on a bag of mealies, Kobolo talked excitedly. He had seen Stoffel hurry out of the store and the other people waiting there had laughed. They all knew the man. They knew about the woman who lived with him, a Fingo she was, and there was another child who lived with its mother in a kraal on the other side of the Kuphela river. Oh, he was well known, and the people laughed at him, calling him Kiwane, the Fig, because even a fig with a clear skin may be full of worms inside!

Kobolo chuckled to himself; this morning he was a rich man! There had been fun at the store and now he rode home with a bag of mealies, a roll of cloth for his wife and cigarettes for Lereng and Masindile. He shook his head, thinking of the two great men and of the new life that they had brought to him. The Basuto with human bones to throw and Masindile, the Strong One, with huge hands and laughter that boomed through the cave.

'Ai, but that friend of yours, he is a powerful one,' Kobolo said.

The sled slowed down as one of the oxen dropped its dung.

'Quba!' he shouted and they rode over the muck, slithering clumsily down the hillside.

'They said that you must come today specially. I was to bring you alone. First I will leave the mealies and the cloth at home, then we will go on to the sea.'

They left the sled at Kobolo's kraal and they walked together towards the sea. The footpath wandered from kraal to kraal and people greeted them as they passed. At the spot on the ridge where the steep path entered the bush, two blanketed figures waited for them.

'Why were you so long?' Ralitapula demanded.

'I went home first to leave some mealies, 'Nkosi.'

'You are late! Come, we have been waiting for you, Paul.'

Paul came up to Ralitapula and he fingered his new blanket.

'Ah! A Pondo now, a Pondo witch-doctor!'

It was true that word of witchcraft had spread throughout the area. Shixini had sent a gift of a live cockerel down to the cave. Ralitapula had returned the bare carcass with a note wrapped

around a bullet, tucked between its ribs. The note thanked Shixini but warned him of the danger of sending a messenger to the cave. There were stories too, of great flashes of fire rising from the cave and it was said that Mashupa, the old man, had turned white.

Mashupa had not turned white, but he stayed all day in the cave wandering out only at night. He did not see the gunpowder that Ralitapula dropped into the coals. He only saw the flash of fire and heard the man's laughter. He did not see the bright sun refract through the glass of a bottle, but he saw Ralitapula carve his name in fire on a piece of driftwood. The letters smoked as he worked. He did not see the body of a girl killed in the mountains but he saw the small piece of bone that had come from her hand. It was a sacred bone, a human bone and he had shivered uncontrollably when he had been told to feel it. He had touched it with a shaking hand and the two men had screamed and he had run from the cave out into the night. He had heard their laughter ringing out from the cave, the laughter of both of them and he was afraid. Yet, he could not go away. He waited only for the day when they would leave him alone. It was his cave.

A long grey box was now used as a table in Mashupa's cave and a paraffin lamp stood on this table. A billy-can steamed on the coals of Mashupa's fire. Mashupa shuffled up and gave Paul a plate of cooked mussels. Shakes produced a bottle of brandy. He poured himself a drink and held the glass under the cool trickle of the spring.

'Well, here's to you, Paul! Wingè Pondo!'

'What is going on now?' Paul asked. 'The people are restless, what fantasy are you spreading now?'

'That's nice,' Ralitapula said. 'They are talking.'

'Even Zamakulungisa. There is something wrong, he says. The troops are coming to see that all is in order.'

'The troops?'

'Zamakulungisa says they will be in the district today.'

'Today? Why today?'

'How should I know?'

'What else did he say?'

'That there had been some trouble in Bilana

'Yes, in Bilana. But not here, why are they coming here?'

'Perhaps you can tell me.'

Ralitapula went to the spring and filled a glass for himself and then he stood in front of Paul, sipping from the glass.

'Yes, I'll tell you, Paul. Not only will I tell you. I'll show you, tonight at Qomoto beach.'

Mashupa offered the mussels and as he tipped the billy-can, hot salt water spilled on to Ralitapula's hand.

'Careful, you fool!' Ralitapula shouted and Mashupa cringed away from him.

'It was a mistake,' Paul said.

'Christ, how he gets me, the old fool!'

'Leave him alone. He's old but he's not a fool. He's found a refuge from a world he doesn't understand.'

'Words! You and your words! Where's action? Quick, crack, like a shot from a gun.'

'Or the stab of a knife?'

Ralitapula's eyes flashed and he clenched his teeth, cursing Paul.

'You mock me,' he hissed.

'Why did you kill that girl?'

'Careful, Paul!'

'Because she came from the mountains to haunt you. Do you believe that stuff, Shakes?'

'What girl? I don't know about any girl.'

'Fools!' Ralitapula exploded. He pointed an accusing finger at Paul. 'What do you know about these things? What do you know about a witch? You white black man! You who scorns his own people! Who kisses the feet of the Dean, what do you know about Africa?'

'How can I help you then?' Paul said quietly. 'What do you need me for?'

'Easy, Rali, easy,' Shakes said, looking nervously from one to the other. 'Take it easy, you fellows.'

Ralitapula got up suddenly and he went deep into the cave and when he came back he carried a rifle. He held the rifle in his good hand and he walked with it out of the cave. They saw him

stand for a while on the grass threshold and then he shouted for Mashupa. Mashupa scurried to him taking with him a white log from his driftwood pile.

'This you should watch,' Shakes said.

Ralitapula lay down on the grass and Mashupa clambered as fast as he could down to the gully with his white log. He waited until the gully filled, surging deep with a strong wave and, as the water began to suck back, he threw the log high. It splashed into the gully and was carried away by the backwash to be lifted further out by the next wave. The tide had turned and the sea played with the log carrying it out to deeper water.

The rifle cracked suddenly and Paul jumped to his feet. He saw Ralitapula's body shaking as he laughed and he saw Mashupa on the rocks hold up his hands and scream. The old man stood there petrified, looking down at the powdery mark on the rock where the bullet had struck. He could still hear that bullet singing away, out to sea. It could not enter the rock as it could enter a body, but it bounced off and rose singing into the air.

'See the old man jump,' Ralitapula said, as Paul hurried up.

Paul stood above him and he stamped a foot down on the barrel of the rifle.

'Put that away.'

'Why, Paul? Who can hear? Have you ever listened to the sea from your hut? It makes a lot of noise, Paul.'

'Put it away.'

Ralitapula rolled over, leaving the gun on the grass.

'You have a shot. There, at that log. See, it's beyond the waves now, floating in the blue water. A good target.'

'Come up here,' Paul shouted and he looked beyond Mashupa and there was the white log sucked away from the gully.

'One day perhaps we'll have practice here for all those men,' Ralitapula said, and he moved on the grass and picked up the rifle again. He snuggled it into his bad shoulder, the butt close to his neck. His withered hand had strength enough for a trigger and his good left arm held the rifle still. He steadied himself and the rifle jerked again, three times. The silver slicks of the first two shots could be clearly seen, just short of the log. The third

hit the log and it exploded into the air, turning crazily as the heavy bullet spun it out of the water.

'Nice shot, Rali,' Shakes said. 'Let's have a go.'

Mashupa came panting back to the cave and Ralitapula smiled from where he lay.

'Make you jump, old man?'

Mashupa hurried past him into the cave. Why wouldn't they leave him? Why wouldn't they go? He went to his grass bed and he wrapped himself in his blanket and covered his head with it and he shivered there, his body twitching as the shooting continued outside. He felt a hand on his back, he could feel the pressure of it through his blanket. He flipped the blanket off and looked up terrified. Paul stood above him and his hand patted his back.

'It was a cruel thing to do,' Paul said. 'I am sorry, Mashupa. This man is sick somehow.'

'Won't you take them away?' Mashupa whispered. 'Won't you tell them to leave me?'

He produced a mis-shapen metal spear from beneath his blanket. Its prongs were crude and his hand shook as he held it up.

'I make this for Poto so that he can spear fish,' he said, 'but one day I will use it, here in this cave!'

'You must not think of such a thing.'

'Please take them away from me!'

Another shot rang out and Mashupa drew the blanket over his head again, holding the spear-head tightly in his right hand.

Shakes had broken the drifting log into two halves and he tried with two shots from the automatic rifle to hit them both. One shot went straight home and the broken half sank then bobbed up again. The second shot splashed harmlessly as the small white targets drifted further out to sea.

The sky was clear that night and the Southern Cross hung high above the horizon. The waves crept bright and phosphorescent up Qomoto beach as the three men trudged through the loose sea-sand. There was no moon, but the beach was grey and they walked without lights. Ralitapula carried a powerful battery

torch, but he did not turn it on. The sand squeaked under their bare feet and Paul stumbled. Ralitapula caught his arm.

'Careful, boy.'

'It was a root or something.'

'Not far now. This is Qomoto beach. It'll be easier coming back.'

'The tide must be high.'

'There's Kobolo now! The others will be with him.'

Paul saw a small light swinging low. Kobolo walked towards them along the beach. The light stopped and then went out.

'That's the spot,' Shakes said.

'We may have to wait, but they must come before the tide goes out too far.'

Kobolo stood up beside his light but there was no one with him.

'Where are the others?' Paul asked.

'They'll be here, in the bushes.'

They sat down in the sand high up on the beach and Shakes brought out the brandy bottle.

'Is this really where they come in?' Paul asked.

'Right here, boy. Into this little beach.'

They sat facing the sea and Paul looked hard for lights.

'When will they signal?'

'Not yet, Paul, not yet.'

'How often have they been?'

'This will be the fourth time.'

While he lived unknowing so close by, these men smuggled guns into Pondoland! While Zamakulungisa talked of the strange mood of the people boxes were unloaded on Qomoto beach. It was crazy. The whole thing was crazy. Yet it worked, for Paul had seen some of the boxes, packed neatly in the cave. How could one believe such a story when it is whispered to one over the counter of a Goods Office?

They were silent for a while and it seemed that at any moment a great light would shine way out to sea, but there was no light, only the twinkling of the phosphorescence and the occasional slow fall of a shooting star. Ralitapula's voice came from the darkness and a hand touched Paul's leg.

'You're with us now, Paul. You're with us and we need you.'

'I wonder if you can make it this way?'

'There's no other way.'

'At one time there was. At one time I could see hope for another way.'

'That's gone long ago, Paul. Gone, boy.'

'Are you sure?'

Kobolo hushed them suddenly and pointed out towards the rocks. A light shone there, a dull flame.

'Who's that?'

'Sasa,' Kobolo whispered. 'The sasa have come.'

'Go and see who it is and tell him to put out that light!'

'Ja, 'Nkosi.'

Kobolo hurried away and soon the light went out and the lonely fisherman, with his long straw torch unwillingly extinguished in a rock pool, sat silent in the dark wondering how it was that some people thought they owned the sea. Why couldn't he spear the sasa, now that they had come with the tide?

'The time for compromise has long gone, Paul,' Ralitapula said. 'All we need now are good men to lead us. Men trained and able, like yourself.'

'Me? What training have I had?'

'You could learn, Paul. You could learn quickly if you were given the chance.'

'Just think, Paul,' Shakes said, moving closer to him on the sand and holding out a hand to the night and to the sea. 'Just think how that brain of yours could learn. It could learn to lead us, to lead us to the new world! How's that, hey!'

'Talk of new worlds while we squat like smugglers on the beach!'

Kobolo came running up to them breathing heavily.

'It's a fisherman. His name is Tatzela. From Madundu's location. I know him.'

'He's O.K.?'

'He's a good fellow. Not too clever.'

Kobolo tapped his forehead with his forefinger.

'He is truly Tatzela, the Flustered One.'

'Send him home.'

'Ja, 'Nkosi.'

Kobolo moved off again and as he disappeared into the shadows Paul saw a light flash way out to sea.

'What's that?' he whispered, grabbing Ralitapula's arm.

'Didn't you believe us, Paul?'

The light flashed again and Ralitapula stood up and walked down to the water. The bright beam from his own torch cut through the darkness and picked out the whiteness of the waves. Then it was lost, absorbed in the stretching distance of the sea beyond. The light flashed again from the sea, several times, and Ralitapula turned, excited now.

'They are coming in. Where's Kobolo?'

'Can it really be?'

'Get up! Come on!' Ralitapula ordered.

Kobolo returned, running fast through the sand.

'Get them in,' Ralitapula ordered.

Kobolo disappeared into the bushes beyond the beach and then from the bushes naked men came, walking in orderly file down to the sea. They walked past Paul so close and he reached out a hand and touched one of them.

'Who are you?' he asked.

There was no reply from the darkness but the man stopped.

'Who are you?' Ralitapula demanded and, hearing that voice, the man replied.

'Hiligiqi of Madundu's,' the voice said.

'Go on in!'

The man followed the others down to the sea and they stepped into the waves.

The breaking waves seemed to be lit up suddenly and Paul saw the dark cloud over the horizon shown up in a thin black line by the rising moon. It came slowly up out of the sea and the yellow light flickered towards them dancing crazily across the sea.

'They are late,' Ralitapula said.

The light flashed again from the sea, nearer this time, and Ralitapula returned the signal.

'Where do they come from?' Paul whispered.

'A submarine, you fool.'

'No, Rali, this is fantasy!'

'A huge one, Paul. We saw it once close in. The moon was up that night.'

'No, Shakes, this is from a story book!'

Ralitapula shone the torch once more and in the light of it could be seen the splash of a low bow wave and the dark hulk of a landing launch. Paul heard the low rhythm of the engine now and he saw the boat rise with a wave

Black hands caught the boat as it floated in with the surf and for a moment the silence was broken. The excitement was too much for Kobolo's naked men and they shouted and yelled at one another as the boat swung into them.

'Damn them!' Ralitapula hissed. 'The noisy kaffirs! Here, take this!'

Ralitapula handed his battery lamp to Paul, and he hurried down to the water's edge, running into the waves.

The boat was well held now and Kobolo was there hanging to the bow, being lifted with the boat as each wave came. There was activity on the boat, and soon the long naked line returned in pairs, struggling with heavy boxes.

'I can't believe it,' Paul said, and then he felt Shakes's hand on his shoulder.

'It's neat, hey? A neat little job.'

Men stumbled past and there was a single shout from the boat and then Ralitapula hurried back to them, breathing hard now.

'O.K., Paul,' he panted. 'This is it.'

'I've seen it now,' Paul said. 'I've seen it and I believe you! But is this the way?'

'Come on,' Shakes said, his mouth close to Paul's ear. 'You're going with them.'

Two men came up from the sea and they stood there waiting on the beach. In the growing light Paul saw their strange features, and a sense of unreality floated around him like an evil spell. One man held a hand out to him. Come on. Come fellow, the moon is rising, we haven't much time. Come, take my hand, fellow. Come with us. There is not much time. Soon the light will shine and the world will be able to see. Soon the dark path that leads to the sea will show up twisting into the distance

behind you. You have reached the edge now, you have come to the cliff. Where is the other side? Where is it this time?

Paul took a step towards them and then the two men were beside him, ready to pick him up and help him to the boat.

'It's for the good of your own people,' Ralitapula said.

'Good luck,' Shakes said.

The familiar voices shattered the spell and suddenly Paul broke away and pushed the two men aside.

'Fools!' he shouted and he made for the bushes. He tripped in the sand, got up, crying out loud. 'Fools! Fools!'

The two men ran after him and Paul turned and they lunged at him. He swung the heavy lamp at the leading man and the edge of it, hard and sharp, caught his cheek bone. The man stumbled and dropped to his knees on the sand. The second sailor hesitated a while, bent to help his friend, and Paul ran on up to the bushes that lined the beach. He hurried along the sandy path and he heard the man curse behind him. He heard a familiar shout and he turned towards the sound and then he stumbled into the blanketed shapes of more of Kobolo's men. The phantom figures waited, unknown gun-bearers, dark in the bushes. He heard a friendly voice and a heavy stick was thrust into his hand.

'He is behind you,' the voice said. 'Turn and face him.'

Paul turned, the heavy stick in his hand, and he saw the following sailor stop where the white beach-sand path entered the bush. He stood there, unsure, and Paul stepped towards him with the kerrie raised high.

Turn and face them. With a Pondo stick. Thank you kind voice in the dark. Thank you Wanyama, Man of Darkness. Thank you for the firm friendliness, the smooth weapon. I will remember you.

Ralitapula and Shakes went to help the sailor who had fallen and then there were further commands from the boat and other men sprang into the water and hurried up the beach. They went to their comrade who had risen to his feet now and who held one hand to his shattered jaw. He pointed to the bushes and some of the men ran that way and then a bright light shone.

Paul charged out of the bushes with the stick held high. He

shone the light into the face of the one sailor and he saw the flat features, the slit-flash of purpose in strange eyes. The face of the enemy was ghost-like this time, the orb of the rising moon behind it. He brought the heavy Pondo fighting stick down hard.

Others were on him then and skilfully they brought him down, beat the last fight out of him with neat blows, then trussed him up and carried him back to the sea. One man took his arms, another his legs and others walked beside. They linked hands beneath him and lifted his unconscious body higher as they entered the water.

Kobolo still held to the bow and then he felt the boat scrape the sandy bottom. There was a command from the boat and men jumped into the water. Others came back from the bushes to help, but the boat was stuck. Ralitapula and Shakes ran in too and when a strong wave came the launch was lifted free and the engine throbbed again and sand churned at the men's feet as the boat backed out to deeper water. They turned its head into the waves and the spluttering of the exhaust could be heard above the surf sound. Kobolo and Ralitapula and Shakes watched as the launch heaved up and away, returning to the darkness from whence it had come, carrying with it Paul Ndizile, the Pondo with wings.

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Mashupa could move freely when the sun was down. The darkness had become his friend these nights. He had heard the men talk of Qomoto beach and when they told him to remain behind, he obeyed. He remained behind until they had passed through the cliff gap and then he followed them, unafraid in the darkness, keeping away from the beach and close to the bushes. He heard the whispers of the men and he saw Paul Ndizile charge with the Pondostick and he saw the strange man fall. He watched from the bushes and he saw the others take Paul then and he

saw him carried off, like a buck killed in the fields, carried between two men, the dark sacrificial shape held above the sea.

He heard the sound of the boat above the hiss of the waves and then there was whispering around him and men struggled with heavy boxes. He left his hiding place and hurried back, limping ahead of the others and he passed through Inhlabamkhosi as the moon rose high and cast shadows on the boulders. He shuffled up the cliff path to the cave, then he turned and faced the sea. There was nothing out there but the gold shiver of moonlight on the moving waves. He looked back towards Inhlabamkhosi and he saw the men pass through it carrying the boxes. When they started on the cliff path he went into the cave and covered himself with a blanket and lay down quickly.

He heard them come in and he heard the whispers as they carried the boxes deep into the cave. He heard sharp commands and he could pick out Lereng's voice and Kobolo's and others.

Then a foot rested on his shoulder and shook him. He flicked the blanket away and sat up suddenly, crying out.

'O.K., Mashupa, we're going now, old man,' Lereng said.

He knelt down there in the cave and he held the small bone in his hand, showing it to Mashupa. Suddenly he moved to one side and clamped his hand to Mashupa's chest so that the bone dug into his skin, sharp and frightening.

'Your heart is in there, old man,' Lereng said. 'The fingers of a dead girl curl around it and they will squeeze it until it can no longer pump blood for your feeble body.'

Lereng pressed harder and Mashupa could feel the bone boring into his ribs, and he could hear the rising beat of his own heart.

'Remember Kwenkwana, old man? Your son that died up there. He now has a brother who sits by him, for another Ndizile grew wings tonight. He was taken by the sea, old man, he ran too fast along the rocks, hurrying to help us and he slipped. You know well how these rocks can be when the spray has wet them. He slipped and he fell and the sea took him.'

'No,' Mashupa said. 'It was not like that.'

'It was like that, old man. He was taken by the sea. Tomorrow you must go down to the beach and you must search for his body

there on the other side of Inhlabamkhosi. For we will not be here. We are leaving you in peace at last, old man.'

The pressure lessened on his chest and then Lereng removed his hand.

'Kobolo will look after your cave now, old man,' he said.

He stood up and Mashupa could still feel the ache of the bone pressed to his heart but he knew now how the man had lied. And knowing this he knew also that the bone was not a bone from a child's hand but from a lamb perhaps, or a small pig, and he rubbed at the spot where it had pressed to him. He thought how he must hurry away as soon as he had the chance, and he must tell his brother what had happened on Qomoto beach that night.

Jessie was not asleep and she got out of bed when she heard the knock. She slipped the latch and opened the door and a man stepped in past her, pushing the door closed behind him.

'Paul! . . . Where is Paul?'

'Let's have a light, Jessie.'

'Where is Paul?'

Ralitapula lit a match and he moved to the table and raised the glass of a lamp that stood there and lit the wick.

'Paul went down to the sea,' he said.

'Ralitapula, it's you!'

'Yes, Jessie, it's me come back again.'

'What have you done with Paul?'

Jessie was suddenly aware of her shape and of the flimsy gown in the lamplight. She backed away from him and slumped down on to her bed, staring at him.

'Tell me,' she whispered.

'He went down to the sea, Jessie.'

'Please, oh please.'

Jessie dropped her head into her hands and she sobbed as Ralitapula spoke.

'I have come back, Jessie.'

'Where's Paul? Please tell me what you've done with him!'

Ralitapula put a hand, his good hand, on her back as she slumped there, and he spoke to her quietly so that she would understand every word.

'You know Mashupa's cave? You have heard Poto tell of it?'

'What have you done with him?'

'I have been hiding there, Jessie. Paul has known about it and he used to come and see us.'

Jessie looked up suddenly, her eyes terribly afraid.

'I knew there was something! It was not only Kobolo.'

'Mashupa taught us to fish from the rocks. He knows the rocks and he knows the sea. We fish at night sometimes and last night Paul came out with us. We were standing near a gully and a huge wave came up suddenly and we were washed off our feet. I clutched at the rocks but I did not see Paul again. I heard him shout and that was all. He was sucked away into the gully and the sea took him. We waited, and we searched, Jessie, but there was no sign. The sea has taken him, Jessie.'

'No! No!' Jessie sobbed into her hands.

'That is how it happened. I came up here to tell you.'

There was a quick knock and Old Paul's voice could be heard outside.

'Jessie, is Paul back? There is something going on down at the beach!'

'Come in, father,' Jessie called, and Old Paul opened the door. He saw the man standing by her bed and he hurried up to him.

'Paul! What is happening down at the beach?'

The man turned and Old Paul saw the piercing eyes and the mocking smile.

'Remember me?' Ralitapula said.

'Lereng, the Basuto. Where is Paul?'

'Ask Jessie, she knows.'

Someone shouted from the doorway.

'The army, Rali, they've arrived. Let's move!'

Ralitapula bent down quickly and he kissed Jessie on the forehead and Jessie recoiled from him.

'I'll be back, Jessie. I'll look after you,' he called, and then he hurried off with his friend Shakes Masindile.

Old Paul walked alone down to the river mouth leaving Mary and Jessie together in his own hut. The moon was straight above

now and when morning came it would hang light and unnoticed over the land. He removed his shoes and he waded across the river mouth and the water was strangely warm. It was water coming in from the sea with the rising tide, salty and clear. He continued up the path that led to the high ridge and from the ridge he could see the torches of men on the beach. He sat for a while on an ant-heap near the ridge path for he was tired. He sat there and he watched the lights moving on the beach and he could sometimes see the forms of the men against the white sand. He saw them like unknown shadows far away, clay toys in a child's dream. The shadow of a moving cloud hid the beach for a moment and Old Paul looked up at the sky and he saw the cloud pass across the moon. There was a light breeze from the sea and it would bring early morning rain. He stood up and continued along the path that led down to the beach.

The path wound down the side of the hill and, in places, shale rattled from under his feet and cascaded down to settle soon on the scree below. He stumbled once and to stop himself falling outwards he sat down on the shale and slid a few feet, the pieces of shale piling over his shoes. He sat there on the hillside and removed his shoes for the second time and shook the stones from them. He could hear the men calling to one another now and once he thought he saw a glint of a bayonet.

He had seen armed men before, glorious in ceremony, marching through the city showing to the people what weapons they held. He had seen war planes fly over in a clear sky and he had heard the people say that even in Pondoland, great whirling birds flew over the mealie fields and came to rest near the cattle kraals. Men were carried off into the air and women waved after them as the machine rose into the sky like a fish eagle with its prey. If you chose to hide in the long grass the wind from the great plane would flatten it and then the monster would settle near you and snatch you up!

Old Paul rose to his feet again and continued down to the beach. A larger stone was dislodged from the hill and it rolled down and a torch beam shone towards him. It flashed into his eyes and then others turned on to him and someone shouted.

'Hey, you, come down!'

'I'm coming,' Old Paul said to himself, 'I am coming to look for the body of my son, what are you looking for?'

'Hey, you up there, come on down!'

He stumbled the last few steep yards to the beach and then they were around him, many of them, and he saw that they were soldiers and that the glint had been the glint of a bayonet.

'Who are you?' one of them asked.

'I am Paul Ndizile.'

'Ndizile! That's the one!' another said.

Two men stepped to either side of him and they held his arms, their fingers digging into his flesh.

'Hey, over here!' one of them called, and then other soldiers ran up and more torches shone.

'Who are you?' someone asked again.

'I am Paul Ndizile.'

Then a man who was not a soldier came up to him and he heard him ask in Xhosa.

'Who are you?'

'I have told these men. I am Paul Ndizile.'

'The old man?'

'Yes, the old man.'

'This is his father,' the man said, and Old Paul recognized the voice as that of Stoffel who worked at Zamakulungisa's store.

'Are you also looking for Paul?' Old Paul asked.

'So he was with them was he?'

'Have you found him?'

'We have found no one, old man. We were too late, I think. Whose is this? Is it your son's?'

The man held out a large torch. The soldiers let go of Old Paul's arms and he took the torch and looked at it, turning it over in his hands.

'It is a fine torch, but it is not Paul's. I have never seen it before.'

'There have been other people on the beach tonight,' the man said.

'Paul must have been with them for he was taken by the sea.'

'He was what?'

'He fell on the rocks and he was taken by the sea.'

The soldiers looked at one another and then again a torch shone into Old Paul's eyes.

'Shall we take him along?' someone asked.

There was another shout then, further down the beach.

'Hey, you, stop!'

Men hurried along the beach and a figure moved amongst the rocks then dropped down behind a big boulder. A warning shot rang out and Old Paul saw the burning bullet trace a long arc over the dark rocks, bright, like a star returning. The man stood up then, his hands held high, and the torches pinned him there. The soldiers brought him on to the sand and again Stoffel spoke.

'This is the old man's brother,' he said. 'This is Mashupa, the limping one!'

Mashupa was made to stand in front of his brother, and his body shook as the men held him. Old Paul put a hand on his shoulder.

'Mashupa, so you too. You have come to look for Paul.'

'I saw the lights,' Mashupa said.

'Now what?' one of the soldiers asked. 'What we do with two old men?'

'Ag, leave them,' Stoffel said. 'Tell them to come tomorrow. Let's get back to the jeeps, we'll go to the other fellow's kraal.'

'I want to see you two tomorrow,' the soldier said. 'We are camped at Hlabeni Bend. Come there.'

'Yes, 'Nkosi, we will come.'

He shone his torch from one to the other and Mashupa noticed that it was the big torch that Lereng had used, but he said nothing. They left them there standing alone on Qomoto beach.

The brothers sat together in Mashupa's cave and the fire burned warm between them. Outside the dawn rain made a grey sheet across the entrance to the cave and the sound of the sea was muffled. Old Paul huddled in a blanket and he held his hands out to the flames, rubbing them as they became too hot and turning them over and over. The coarse chafing of his hands could be heard above the hiss of the rain outside. With his foot he moved a dry log further into the heart of the fire.

Mashupa worked at his fishing spear. The three metal prongs were still crudely shaped and with a sea-round stone he hammered at the base of the spear. The hammering echoed in the cave.

'Poto will use this spear,' Mashupa said, 'he is growing strong.'

'I think you should leave it now. Build a bigger fire some other day, but leave it now.'

'Kwenkwana was strong too. He always knew when the rains would come. He always told me to wait.'

'This is useless rain, my brother. The fields are reaped.'

'Kwenkwana was good with a whip, and Poto can lead oxen better than any other young boy.'

'Yes, Mashupa. But leave the spear for now.'

'It is nearly morning.'

It was nearly morning on a new day and a brother hammered on a mis-shaped piece of iron and a son was being carried away over the sea! Other men with guns hid in the hills. Would they stay hidden for ever, and would they escape the hot bullets? Or would they leave the hills and hurry away to another place and be shot down as they ran? In the end would those who brought the evil stand up in triumph over the graves of the innocent?

'You are sure it was Paul whom they carried off?'

'It was Paul. I saw him carried high above men's shoulders.'

'To where, my brother?'

'Strange men came out of the dark sea and they took him.'

'Strange men? Did Paul stand upright with a hand held out?'

'He did not hold out a hand, he held a stick! They had to pounce on him and tie him up and carry him away. Like a bush buck killed in a field!'

'Who would want him so much, my brother, when others have scorned him?'

Old Paul pulled an edge of the blanket away from the coals and tucked it beneath his feet. He was wrapped there, warm in a cave, and the rain outside fell on to the sea, and by the river it would soak into the fields that had been reaped.